

Central BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

presented by



W. J. COXEY

KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

KANSAS CITY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

W. J. COXEY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

OF

THIS WORK.



It is with great pleasure that I hear that a republication of Gray's "Priesthood" is demanded by the Christian community; and the right to do so, is cheerfully given my esteemed friend, the Publisher. The work is one on which my late revered and beloved father spent much of his time, talent, and acquirements; and one which retained his own approbation even to his last days. From his clerical friends he never received but one opinion, and that was uniform commendation and satisfaction. My relationship forbids me saying of the work what I would rejoice to say under other circumstances. The preliminary and subsequent remarks, to the main question, will meet generally the views of the evangelical public. With the full conviction, that every mind that reads the solution of that hitherto perplexed and perplexing question will be entirely relieved and delighted, I have only to wish, that the Publisher may receive an ample remuneration for his risk in issuing an edition.

C. G. McLEAN.

. January 26, 1844.

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RECOMMENDATIONS.

NEW YORK, December 26, 1843.

I HAVE just learned, my dear Sir, that you are about to republish the work of the late Dr. James Gray, on the "Priesthood of Melchisedec." You will allow me to express the hope that it may be widely circulated. Of all the productions of the Dr.'s gifted mind (and few minds were more gifted), this is certainly the ablest. Indeed, I have long regarded it as containing the only satisfactory exposition of the passage of Scripture which it professedly analyses.

The late Dr. Mason, when delivering a course of lectures upon the Epistle to the Hebrews, on coming to the beginning of the 7th chapter, read to his congregation the volume in question; remarking, that it was better than anything he could prepare for them. I will only add, that the style of the work is fine, many parts of it indeed are of surprising brilliancy, and all of it is marked by that sprightliness, vigour, and energy, for which the writer was distinguished.

J. McELROY.

TO WILLIAM STEWART, Hagerstown, Md.

THE undersigned has pleasure in expressing his entire concurrence in the estimate of Dr. Gray's work on the "Priesthood," stated above by Dr. McElroy. Dr. Gray was a man of genius, and one of the most eloquent and attractive writers of his day. In the little work on the Priesthood, he has given, perhaps, the only satisfactory clue to the right understanding of a very difficult subject.

JOHN KNOX.

NEW YORK, December 26, 1843.

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A
DISSERTATION
ON THE
COINCIDENCE BETWEEN THE
PRIESTHOODS
OF
JESUS CHRIST AND MELCHISEDEC,
IN THREE PARTS;

IN WHICH THE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE RELATING TO THAT SUBJECT, IN
THE XIV. CHAPTER OF GENESIS, THE CX. PSALM, THE V. VI. VII.
CHAPTERS OF THE EPIST. TO THE HEBREWS, ARE EXPLAINED.

BY JAMES GRAY, D.D.

πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες. 1 Cor. ii. 13.

WILLIAM STEWART, HAGERSTOWN, MD.
CUSHING & BROTHERS, BALTIMORE, MD.
GEO. S. APPLETON, PHILADELPHIA.

Stereotyped by J. Fagan.

1844.

Christology
Priesthood
Jesus Christ
Melchisedec
211

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1844, by
WILLIAM STEWART,
in the clerk's office of the district court of the United States in and for
the eastern district of Pennsylvania.

(2)

PRINTED BY T. K. & P. G. COLLINS, PHILA.

ADVERTISEMENT.

AGREEABLY to a regulation of the Associate Reformed Church, the Presbytery of Philadelphia, on the 15th November 1805, assigned the author the cx. Psalm, as the subject of a critical discourse. The chief difficulty in that psalm is the parallel between the priesthood of Melchisedec and that of Messiah. He had before that time read various hypotheses on the subject, without being satisfied with any of them; and without that careful and patient examination of the scriptures, which is necessary to obtain satisfaction on such a point. He was now obliged to study the psalm and the apostle's commentary on it. At a subsequent meeting of the Presbytery, the substance of the following dissertation was read. It did not produce much conviction; and was but feebly supported by the author, who, though strongly impressed with the correctness of the views exhibited, was neither dogmatically certain, nor prepared to repel detailed objections. During a part of the years 1808, and 1809, he was engaged in expounding the epistle to the Hebrews to his congregation, and was not displeased with

the necessity imposed on him of analysing, with what accuracy he could, the apostle's phraseology and argument respecting Melchisedec. The consequence was that every doubt vanished.

When the discourse was moulded into its present form, the intention was to publish it in a periodical paper; with which view it was divided into parts. But the extent to which the matter spread, and the injury which a continuous discussion suffers from being cut up into shreds, induced the adoption of the present mode of publication. During the composition, but chiefly since, he has examined every author he could procure, who has treated the subject: in one or other of whom he found most of the ideas here communicated, some apparently thrown out at random, others stated for refutation. The only thing he could refer to, as affording any support to his general views, is a passage in the third volume of Wolfius's *Curæ Philologicæ*.

Care has been taken that the Hebrew and Greek quotations should create as little embarrassment to the English reader as possible.

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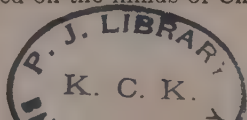
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A DISSERTATION, &c.

PART I.

THAT Melchisedec and Jesus Christ are related as type and antitype is sufficiently apparent; but it is not so obvious what are the coincident points of the typical analogy. It is believed that Christians are not generally satisfied on this subject. And yet the want of satisfaction is not attributable to the want of authors or of investigation: for few themes of theological criticism have been discussed so much, or have engaged a larger portion of talent and learning; and none has given birth to a greater variety of hypotheses. There is scarcely a common Christian, and certainly not one gospel minister, who has not, at one time or another, turned his thoughts to this subject, and endeavoured to reduce his views to systematic order. The circumstances which create so deep an interest in the priesthood of Melchisedec need not be specified in this place: and we may venture to predict, that, as they have operated on the minds of Christians in all



ages down to the present day, there is no danger that this type will ever become a matter of indifference to the Christian church. Those who view the priesthood of our Lord Jesus as the foundation of all their hopes and comforts, will never neglect the type which defines the *order* of that priesthood; while those, whom inclination, or official duty, engages in the interpretation of the sacred oracles, cannot avoid this subject. Besides, the very difficulty of the theme insures it students and authors, in consequence of the operation of that intellectual hardihood, which glories in a dark and dubious field.

The following attempt to illustrate this subject is made with a hope, that the Christian public will not consider it merely as a *curious* one; a *strife of words*, incapable of ministering to *godly edifying*; unworthy a few evenings' labour in a minister's study, or one evening's attention in a Christian's family. If any such prejudice should press on the reader's mind, it is hoped that he will pause and reflect: and a little reflection will be sufficient to satisfy him, that a question respecting his Lord's priesthood; one, whose solution is necessary to qualify him to perceive the full meaning of a passage in the writings of Moses; to understand the 110th

psalm, written by David; and to feel the cogency of a long argument of the apostle Paul, stated in the 5th, and continued throughout the 6th and 7th chapters of the epistle to the Hebrews, is worthy of serious attention.

But there is another impression, which the title of this dissertation may perhaps make on some minds, from which much more serious apprehensions are entertained. It may be thought, that the subject has been long since sufficiently examined; and that, by men whom genius, learning, piety, and superior acquaintance with all the materials of biblical criticism, qualified to do it ample justice. To undertake to cast new light upon it, may be regarded as a forlorn hope; perhaps, as a presumptuous attempt. It may be alleged that the question is already decided; that the public have acquiesced in the decision; and that, as there ought to be an end to literary discussion, as well as to war, the debate should be protracted no farther. If all these allegations be correct, the present publication is manifestly indiscreet. But is the Christian world really satisfied on the present subject? Is it a fact, that they acquiesce in the interpretations which are current? The ultimate appeal, in this case, must be to the Christian ministry; the proper and adequate

judges in such matters. But, if a great part of them acknowledge that the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews is *dark*, is *mysterious*, and contains *many things hard to be understood* ;* that the drift of the apostle's argument is not obvious, that to some of his phrases they cannot affix a decisive meaning ; in fine, that they wish for a degree of satisfaction which they have not yet attained : if this be the case, and these be the sentiments and feelings of a majority of gospel ministers, then I must insist that the question is *not* decided : and that there is yet room, legitimate, fair, honourable room for another attempt. And, I persuade myself, that he who shall make the attempt will be cheered with best wishes for his success, and consoled with sympathy in case of failure.

Melchisedec appears on the sacred page, as a subject of *history*, of *typical prophecy*, and of *doctrinal disquisition*. In the first of these cha-

* II. Pet. iii. 16. This text is supposed, by many commentators, to have a special reference to the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews : others admonish us of the reverence and sobriety, with which we should study that chapter. Such language is more than an inuendo that they were not satisfied with their own interpretations, and were preparing their readers to put up with indistinct views. Reverence and sobriety command us *not* to be satisfied till we are sure we understand the mind of the divine Spirit speaking in the scriptures. Where the Bible ends, mystery begins : " but revealed things *belong* to us."

racters he is exhibited, Gen. xiv. 18, 19, 20.—In the second, Psalm cx.—In the third, Heb. v. 6, 10, 11, and iv. 20, and vii. throughout. The English reader will turn to these passages in the common translation; but the learned reader will have recourse to the originals. It would be quite superfluous to exhibit separate interpretations of these passages. The first is a brief historical narrative; which, of itself, would never have drawn particular attention. The second is a prophecy, founded on an allusion to the former history; succinct, and certainly not very perspicuous. The third is a minute, precise, and laboured explanation of the two former. To this, therefore, let us direct our attention: when we shall have illustrated it, the whole will be clear.

Now, in order to accomplish our purpose, we must keep in view this grand fact, that the priesthood of Jesus is the theme of the epistle to the Hebrews; and, what is worthy of special notice, this is the only book in the New Testament in which the title of *priest* is given him. The *duties* of his priesthood—sacrifice, and intercession—are mentioned every where; but the *official title* only here. The subject is discussed *ex professo*: it is the apostle's *design* to exhibit the high priest of our profession in all the

habiliments, duties, and glories, of his priestly character.

There is one peculiarity which distinguishes Paul from the other sacred writers—his habit of giving set dissertations on doctrinal subjects. It is apparent also, from his writings, that he never takes up a doctrinal subject for the mere pleasure of theoretic discussion; but is always compelled to do this, by the exigencies of the church; particularly, by the assaults made on the Christian faith by false teachers. It therefore merits particular inquiry, why he should select our Lord's priesthood as the subject of formal discussion—and not only inscribe his work to the Jews, but address every argument in it to their peculiar principles and habits of thinking.

The reason is this; the priesthood of Jesus had been assaulted—they were Jews who made the assault—and they were Jews principally who suffered by it. It might be thought that, as the doctrine of atonement for sin was better understood among the Jews than among other nations, the atonement of Jesus should have found no adversaries from that quarter. The reverse, however, was the fact: by no people was that doctrine so much opposed. *Their divine religion, and its divine atonement, occu-*

pied such a place in their hearts, that they saw no need of another religion and atonement: *This divine religion, and its atonement*, frequently seduced them, after they had embraced Christianity, to apostatise: *This divine religion, and its atonement*, furnished a convenient theme of declamation to factious men among the Christians: besides, the Jewish priesthood, actuated perhaps in some instances by honest, though ignorant zeal; but, for the most part, unquestionably actuated by the common motives which have converted the established priesthood of every nation into persecutors of a rising sect,—a tender regard to the dignity of their functions, and their importance in society,—were not idle in sowing discord, and edging the turbulent spirits, which they might find among the Christians, to deeds of mischief. Now, in the view of a Jew, and especially a Jewish priest, the atonement of Jesus was at once the most obnoxious, and the most vulnerable, part of the Christian system; and there, accordingly, they made their desperate assault. 'This general view may suffice for the present: an opportunity will offer for greater precision.

Now, the apostle's view in this epistle is to demonstrate, that the Jewish priesthood and its atonement never took away sin, nor brought in

righteousness, nor saved a soul: that it, and in fact the whole law, had but a "shadow of good things to come:" that Jesus was the substance of that shadow; the real priest, who made the true atonement, and "obtained everlasting reconciliation" for his people. The readers of this epistle will have perceived with what care the apostle keeps this subject before their eyes from the beginning to the end; calling it up at proper intervals, and expressing it in every variety of phrase, and showing its connection with every duty and comfort of the Christian profession. We shall verify these remarks by a few quotations.

Chap. i. 3. "Who, being the brightness of his (the Father's) glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had BY HIMSELF PURGED OUR SINS, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high."

Chap. ii. 9. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man."—10. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect

through sufferings.” 14. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”—17. “Wherefore in all things it became him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

Chap. iii. 1. “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”

Chap. iv. 14. “Seeing then we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”—15. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”—16. “Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

These quotations are sufficient for our purpose. But what would a Jew say to all this? He would say, it is in vain to talk to me of Jesus’s atonement, till you have established his

priestly character; for that only could give him the right and power to make atonement. And I insist on having as good evidence of *his* priesthood, as I have of the priesthood of Aaron. Your demand is reasonable, replies Paul: you have a right to demand proof that he is a priest, and to reject his pretensions if satisfactory proof be not furnished. Here we join issue with you; for it is *our* principle, as well as *yours*, that “no man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron.”* We maintain, as strenuously as *you* can do, that for any person, without a divine commission, to step in between an offended God and offending sinners, and pretend to atone for the sins of the one, and to reconcile both, would be, not only the essence of folly, but highly criminal presumption. And we assert that Jesus did not *usurp* the honour of the priesthood;† and stand ready to prove that he was called of God, as was Aaron, to that high dignity.—Produce your proof then, exclaims the Jew.—You have it, rejoins Paul, in the 110th psalm; where king David uses these words: “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” Here is proof

• Heb. v. 4.

† Heb. v. 5.

positive and indisputable. Messiah, the son of David, is a priest—a priest appointed by God—appointed with an oath—and after the order of Melchisedec.

It is perfectly apparent that the apostle by this quotation proved all he undertook to prove, and something more; for he not only established the fact that Messiah must be a priest, but fixed the *order* of his priesthood. And alas! it is not the order of Aaron, but the order of Melchisedec. How is a Jew to endure this! We may *condemn* antiquity; nothing is more easy, nothing requires less knowledge or virtue; but to *judge* the ancients is another affair. The man who would do this must expunge from his mind the knowledge, habits, and sentiments of his own age. He must make himself a cotemporary with the *pannels*; must see with their eyes, must adopt their habits, must communicate with them in all their impressions, and motives, and feelings. How was a Jew, I ask again, to be told that God, wholly overlooking the divine priesthood of Levi, had gone back to Melchisedec, who was not even of the seed of Abraham, and taken his priesthood as a more noblê pattern for the priesthood of Messiah? Say not, the *evidence* was such as to compel belief. In real life, *motives* have as

much, if not more, to do with our principles, than evidence. And, in the present case, though the evidence was strong on the one side; the motives were on the other. Paul saw the peril of his situation, as the advocate of divine truth. He saw arrayed against him an host of prejudices inherent in the blood of Israelites, and consecrated into religious principles, by zeal for their ecclesiastical establishment. He knew that where national pride is concerned, where the confidence of old opinions is to be encountered, where the strongest of human principles—religious vanity—is to be humbled, the triumph of truth is scarcely possible; because, in such circumstances, men, so far from candidly weighing evidence, have already pre-judged the question.

A man honest though weak, may tell the truth, but in general, like the prophecies of Cassandra, it will do no good. It belongs to wisdom to give practical effect to truth. Paul was wise. His great apprehension was that his countrymen would spurn the question, and refuse to admit to discussion the idea of a priesthood different from Aaron's.* His object is to com-

* Note. General addresses to large bodies of men are always to be understood with those limitations which the knowledge of real life suggests. It would be too much to suspect the *whole*

pel them to investigate that question. And, to accomplish his purpose, in a strain of terror, sufficient to make the hair stand on our heads, and that has shook with dread the consciences of Christians from that day to this, he demonstrates that an error on this subject is *perdition*. They must, therefore, they must, at the peril of their souls, examine whether Jesus has not a priesthood, totally different in nature and efficacy, from the priesthood of Aaron. This is his sole object from the 11th verse of the 5th chapter to the end of the 6th. A more consummate piece of oratorial address, was not penned since man first dipt pen in ink. It shows us the man who knows human nature:

body of Jewish Christians of doubting the priesthood of Messiah: of those who doubted, *some* must have carried their objections farther than others; and a great variety of causes must have operated on the minds of the different parties. There were *turbulent schismatics*—there were *hypocritical professors*—*very ignorant and very weak believers*, affected by doubts of *different kinds*, among the Jewish Christians: and, therefore, although the apostle's *arguments* establish the truth equally to all; it would be unjust to give an equally extensive application to his *inuendoes*. Besides, we cannot suppose the apostle indifferent to the fate of the unconverted Jews: and as all these, particularly the priests, would be clamorous against the idea of a priesthood different from that of Aaron, it is morally certain that the apostle would have some regard to their conversion, in his treatment of his subject: or, supposing him to have little hopes of their conversion, he must have been solicitous to stop their mouths.

and is fully worthy of Paul, or rather, I should say, of the Spirit by whom he was instructed. Let us attend to the workings of the apostle's mind: it is necessary to our purpose to do so.

He commences, by telling them that he had many things to say of *priest Melchisedec*, as a type of *priest Messiah*; but adds, with magnanimous and prepossessing candour, that they were such poor proficients in Christian knowledge, so "unskillful in the word of righteousness," that nothing but the "first principles of the oracles of God," such as *faith, repentance, and future judgment*, (those initiatory principles, the knowledge of which was exacted of converts previous to baptism,) and that *imposition of hands*, which conferred the Holy Ghost, could be offered to them with any great prospect of advantage. He tells them they are "babes," who "have need of milk," or the simplest elementary truths; not full grown men, who are capable of digesting the "strong meat," which God has provided, in the enlarged and general views of gospel doctrine. However, in the face of all these discouragements, he avows his determination to use his utmost effort to carry them on to perfection—to that state of Christian maturity, in which they would be capable of enjoying the full consolation of their holy faith.

He then places before them the tremendous danger to which they would expose their souls, if they should neglect to second him, by giving this subject a serious examination, and adopting a correct decision. He reminds them of the example of some, who, like them, had passed the threshold of the Christian church; but neglecting to advance, and beginning to doubt, had fallen into a course of backsliding, which had terminated in the most deplorable apostacy. Of such apostates he draws a most horrific picture. The privileges which those unhappy persons had enjoyed, and the attainments to which they had arrived, are enumerated in slow detail. They had been "*enlightened*" in the doctrine of salvation by Jesus: they had "*tasted of the heavenly gift,*" and been "*made partakers of the Holy Ghost,*" having received him after the day of Pentecost, not as a spirit of sanctification, which was enjoyed under the law; but as a spirit of gospel illumination, which was received, not by "the law," but by "the hearing of faith."* They had "*tasted the good word of God,*" having been convinced of the truth of the gospel, and induced to adopt its profession; and "*the powers of the world to come,*" or the miraculous powers of Messiah's earthly kingdom.

* Gal. iii. 2.

Such were the attainments of these apostates. But after having been lifted up to heaven, in respect to privilege, they plunged to hell with proportionate guilt. *They crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame*; daringly spurning the doctrine of salvation by his blood: and thus sealed their doom. Better they had never known the truth: for then their sins would have had the extenuation of ignorance; or, it might have been possible to convert them by the preaching of the gospel. But now, after having audaciously denied the truth, of which they had been convinced—after having surrendered their understanding to sophistry, steeled their consciences against remorse, and thus insulted the Holy Ghost; God gives them up to strong delusions that they may believe a lie, declares that his Spirit shall no longer strive with them, commands his church not to breathe a prayer for them, and abandons them to their sin and its reward.*

* This passage of scripture, viz. Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6, — and that other passage, chap. x. 29, have nothing to do with the question, *whether a regenerated person may fall from a state of grace.* The question to which these passages relate, is this: *whether a person, who has heard the gospel, and has been enlightened by the Spirit of God to perceive its truth, and adopt it with joy, may, after all, renounce the whole system of divine truth, and spurn the idea of salvation by the blood of Jesus.* The scriptures cer-

I am persuaded that this is no fancy piece: but that the apostle is here describing what his

tainly speak of this as a possible case; and too many instances of the fact have occurred, to admit any doubt about the existence of such apostates. It is an apostacy, known to, and gloried in, by the apostates themselves: an apostacy, which the Christian church can see and know, else the general commandment to pray for all men, had never been limited by a command not to pray for such men: finally, it is an apostacy from which there is no recovery.

We sometimes hear Christians, in their prayers, confessing that they "have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."—"That they have trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing." We may not charge such persons with any error in idea; but their expressions are in the highest degree improper: for, they confess a sin, which no Christian, at any period of his life, ever committed: nay, one which no *professor* of Christianity has committed: they confess themselves guilty of the *unpardonable sin*. Those dreadful terms are appropriated by the divine Spirit to the most dreadful instance of human guilt: the association between the phraseology and the crime should never be dissolved. The highest effect of the malignity of sin, and the most unrelenting wrath displayed by God in his government over man, should stand distinct from ordinary crimes and punishments. Two important ends would be promoted by this. The man enlightened in the doctrine of salvation *through the blood* of Jesus, would be put on his guard against the sophistries and corruptions which would lead him from one step of backsliding to another, till he had "trampled under foot the Son of God." On the other hand, tender consciences would be delivered from needless terrors. A mind only partially instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, and disordered by the intense operations of a conscience deeply convicted of sin, and by the fiery darts of the evil one, is apt to aggravate all things, and impute to itself, not only its real guiltiness, but a guilt from which it is free, that of the sin unto death. Let the nature of that sin be distinctly

eyes had often seen. It has all the congruity of a painting from the life. It will have been noted that Paul places the essence of apostacy in rejecting the *atonement* of Jesus; or, to use his own words, in "crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame;" or, as the idea is yet more fully expressed in the 10th chapter, *in treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing*. How well suited this representation of his was to produce the impression on the mind of the Jews most favourable to his design is apparent to every one. The priesthood of Jesus, as distinguished from that of Aaron, is his theme; and he tells them that they must cleave to that priesthood and its atonement,—or they are *lost*: from that priesthood, now that they had been enlightened in its nature, should they apostatise, though no farther than to the Aaronic priesthood, repentance is *impossible*; and mercy *no more*.

But does he suspect the whole Christian church of verging towards apostacy? Is he so

known. Surely every Christian can lay his hand on his breast, and looking up to the Searcher of hearts, can say, I do *not* "count the blood of Jesus an *unholy thing*:" "I do *not* tread the Son of God contemptuously under foot." I do *know* that his blood is *precious blood*.

injudicious as to express distrust, while he labours to create confidence? God forbid that the body of the faithful should ever become the object of distrust and jealousy! The apostle did not suspect the Christian Jews of being generally inclined to reject the priesthood of their Messiah. He is equally above pretending an unfounded alarm, or cherishing an unfounded confidence. The conduct of the general body was such as to prove the sincerity of their faith; and as few men ever felt a keener indignation against iniquity, or could express themselves with greater severity against wicked men, than Paul; so there never was, perhaps, any man, who felt a more sincere pleasure in recognising virtue, and praising virtuous men. He therefore thus addresses them, in the strain of confidence and commendation: "but beloved we hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak." A few had apostatised, but the general body had retained the faith: some might be just objects of suspicion, but the mass of them were objects of confidence; they might be weak, might have their doubts and difficulties, but they had given abundant proofs of sincerity and candour. Ch. vi. 9, 10.

The apostle proceeds however to caution

them against danger : there was danger, and he exhorts them to use the means of avoiding it. “And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Ch. vi. 11. 12.

He concludes by holding out the most decided hopes of success, to animate their exertions. He reminds them of the promise of God to their father Abraham, afterwards confirmed by an oath : which promise, and oath, says he, are two immutable securities, that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us : which hope we have, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail, whither the forerunner is for us entered. Ch. vi. 13.—20.

Having thus raised an high idea of the importance of his theme :—having humbled their pride, by reflecting on the deficiency of their knowledge :—having alarmed their fears, by the danger of apostacy :—conciliated their benevolence, by avowing his conviction of the sincerity of their Christian faith :—and animated them with hopes derived from the covenant faithfulness of their God—he resumes the subject

of discussion, "Jesus made an high priest after the order of Melchisedec." Ch. vi. 20.

After so long an introduction, the reader perhaps is impatient to enter on the subject. But we must beg his indulgence a little longer, till we shall have examined the correctness of two notions, which have exerted an unhappy influence on the minds of most people who have studied the scriptures relating to Melchisedec.

I. Is it a fact—Or have we any reason to believe—that the Apostle has kept back from his readers any thing that he knew of this subject? He tells us he had *many* things to say of Melchisedec; but he seems to hesitate about saying them. Perhaps he has left some of them unuttered and thus put it out of our power to attain that satisfaction, which nothing but a connected view of a whole theme can afford. If this be the case, we must commence our labours with depressed spirits; for nothing so damps the ardour of inquiry as a previous impression that satisfaction is unattainable.

Now it is believed there is no reason whatever, not even the shadow of a reason, or of a suspicion, that the apostle has left untold a *single one* of the *many* things he had to say about Melchisedec. For, in the first place, it is not possible that he should raise such lofty

expectations, and labour through so long a proemium, to dispose us to listen and learn; and then to frustrate, and mock our hopes, by telling but half the tale. Let not Paul be suspected of a piece of deception, which would render any writer contemptible. And then, in the second place, on examining his discourse, we find it so minute, and circumstantial, that it is impossible to conceive an omission. Melchisedec's name, royalty, city, priesthood, blessing of Abraham, and receiving tythes from him; his separation from, and superiority over, the Levitical, priests, are all condescended on; and his typical relation, in all these respects, to Messiah argued even to minutiae. We are not justifiable in presuming that any writer, much less an inspired writer, has treated his subject imperfectly, unless we can point with our finger to the precise omission. This, in the present case, no man has done, and no man can do. Paul has finished his portrait of Melchisedec, with professed precision.

II. The other idea, and the one that has had the chief share in preventing Christians from understanding this subject, is this: that there is some undefined, and it would seem undefinable, difficulty; some profound *mystery*, in the apostle's discourse concerning Melchisedec. For

has he not told us himself that the things he had to say were "*hard to be uttered*:" a deep mystery then, no doubt, they contain; perhaps, an inscrutable mystery: for, a difficulty so great in the times of *inspiration*, may well be supposed insuperable in this remote age, so much less skilled in typical questions. This is all very plausible. And there is no manner of doubt, that the imagined abstruseness of the theme has discouraged many from studying it; and seduced into refinements and sublimities, those who could not be deterred from investigation.

But this prejudice, though formidable, is quite unfounded. We have no reason to suppose this a difficult, or mysterious question: but ample reason to believe it the reverse. The apostle's own discourse must furnish the evidence of this assertion. Does Paul insinuate that HE found any abstruseness in the subject? Does he here, as in another instance, talk of "*unspeakable words—which it was not possible for a man to utter*?"* No such thing. Let any candid man read the last five verses of the fifth, and the first two verses of the sixth chapter, and he will find that the whole difficulty lay with the READERS, not with the WRITER.

* 2 Cor. xii. 4.

And I beg that it may be accurately noted, and remembered, that, in reflecting on the incapacity of his readers, he does not once hint at the *weakness of the human intellect*, nor at any *infirmity common to Christians*: it is a specific infirmity, peculiar, and reproachful, to the Christianised Jews of that day.—“Many things,” says he, “hard to be uttered *seeing ye are dull of hearing*; for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, *ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God*; and are become such as have need of *milk*, and not of *strong meat*. For every one who *useth milk*, is *unskilful in the word of righteousness*; for he is a *babe*. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the *first principles* of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto *perfection*,” &c. This is plain language. They were Jewish babes, persons *unskilful in the word of righteousness*, persons who needed to be taught again the *first principles* of the oracles of God; babes, capable of feeding only on *milk*.—These were the persons to whom the apostle’s words were hard to be uttered. This is the utmost limit to which Paul carried the insinuation of any

difficulty in his subject. To talk of difficulty beyond this, is to talk without book. And surely it may be admitted, nay, it absolutely must be admitted, that persons not labouring under the inveterate prejudices of the Jews, and the infantine weakness of Jewish Christians; that men of *full age, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*, may find the subject very simple, and very plain. This I believe to be the fact. And am persuaded that the chief embarrassment in interpreting the scriptures respecting Melchisedec has originated in one of the commonest, but least curable, of human propensities, an inclination to search for mysteries in plain matters.

The following interpretation is certainly simple; very remote, indeed, from all that is profound and mysterious. But, should it be rejected, I must, even then, insist that the true interpretation, wheresoever, and by whomsoever found, shall be one, which, though it may non-plus babes, will not perplex those, who by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

PART II.

As the apostle has introduced into his discourse the priesthoods of Melchisedec, Aaron, and Jesus—we shall inquire into the divine origin of these three priesthoods.

As he has asserted that Melchisedec's priesthood is, and that Aaron's priesthood is not, the exemplar of Christ's—we shall inquire, in what sense Jesus is said to be a priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron.

As he has produced the prophecy of David, that Messiah should be a priest after the order of Melchisedec—we shall inquire, what could be David's motive; or rather, what could be the intention of the Divine Spirit, in assigning that order of priesthood to him, rather than the order of Aaron.

And, in fine, as the apostle's discussion of the order of Messiah's priesthood is long, minute, and precise—we shall inquire, why he found it necessary to argue this subject so pertinaciously with the Jews.

I. Of the divine origin of the priesthoods of Melchisedec, Aaron, and Jesus.

According to the evidence of scriptural history, the only admissible evidence in the case,

these three priesthoods were divinely constituted; and the only divinely constituted priest-hoods that ever existed among men. Of these, calculating from the commencement of sacrificial functions, Melchisedec's was the first. It is obvious, that by priest is here meant an *official character*, a man "taken from among men," and "ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, that he might offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin."* Of such, Melchisedec was the first. Previous to his day, the offering of gifts and sacrifices for sins was, like prayer, the common right of the faithful; as appears from the offerings of Cain and Abel,† of Noah,‡ &c. &c. In this situation matters continued in respect to worshippers generally, (the tribe which Melchisedec represented probably excepted,) and to the posterity of Abraham in particular; even after the constitution of God's covenant with him, and down to the consecration of Aaron. Previous to this latter period, there was not a priest in Abraham's family; but, as numerous instances attest, every worshipper offered up his own sacrifice, or invited and employed what assistants he pleased. For ages after the calling of Abraham, the institutions of true religion, and the dispensation of the Spirit of grace,

* Heb. v. 1.

† Gen. iv. 3, 4.

‡ Gen. viii. 20.

were continued to several other tribes of men : among these also, the right to offer sacrifice, belonged, for any thing we know, to the faithful in common.

In the early ages of the world, religion had not received that organization, which has distinguished religious societies in subsequent periods. Prophets every age had : Adam, no doubt, was the first ; Enoch, Noah, and others succeeded ; for there could not be any such thing as religion, without a divine revelation : and by a procedure, the wisdom and goodness of which are equally apparent, God raised up from among men the instruments by which his will should be made known to their respective generations. But these were extraordinary characters, and are not known to have had any peculiar functions in the ordinary offices of religious worship. The faithful had no fixed teachers, to preach the truths, or doctrines of religion ; no fixed priests, to present their sacrifices and offerings. Every pious man, no doubt, was ready to embrace such opportunities as might offer of instructing others, and presented his sacrifice in person. We are not to imagine, however, that religion was, in the times alluded to, so entirely a private and personal concern, as to be wholly destitute of social character. It

did always possess social character, and admitted the communion of saints: but that character was defined, not by ecclesiastical constitution, but by the natural arrangements of human society. Thus we find Job offering up sacrifices for his children,* and Jethro, in communion with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel, offering up sacrifice in the Israelitish camp.† Such a course things would naturally take. For, as families and states are equally bound with individuals, to acknowledge the Supreme Being; so it is plain, that those religious solemnities, by which such acknowledgment is made, must of right and necessity, (no divine constitution withstanding,) be conducted by the chief ruler; by the head of the family in the one case, and by the magistrate in the other.

Let us indulge a passing glance down the vista, which opens to us a prospect of the domain of heathenism. There too, we find the priesthood an appendage to the magistracy. Omitting other instances, it shall suffice to notice that the priesthood was a prerogative of royalty in the original constitution of Rome. This connection of offices commenced with Romulus, expired with Tarquin, and was revived, after a long interval, in the person of

* Job i.

† Exod. xviii. 12.

Julius Cæsar. There is a fact too remarkable to be omitted, even in this short notice of the subject; that so fixed and inveterate had the idea of a king-priest become among the Romans, that they considered such a character essential to the state; and, accordingly, when they abolished royalty and instituted a republican form of government, they judged it necessary to elect a *Rex Sacrorum*, or *king of the sacred rites*, to attend to those sacerdotal functions, which had belonged to the kings, under the ancient regimen.* There is, however, no good reason for the allegation, that kings originally usurped the priesthood. For from whom should they usurp it? The same constitution which made them the representatives of their states, gave them a necessary precedence in the expressions of national devotion. But time would show the importance of a prerogative, which exhibited them to the eyes of their subjects in the august character of ministers of the gods; and which, by giving them the control of the popular conscience, or, what in most cases is the same thing, of the popular superstition, rendered that mighty engine subservient to their

* *Rerum deinde divinarum habita cura, et quia quasdam publica sacra per ipsos reges factitata erant, ne ubique regum desiderium esset, regem sacrificulum creant.*—Liv. lib. ii. cap. 2.

political designs. Under the Horeb covenant, the priesthood was separated from the civil authority. There first we discover the rudiments of an enlarged policy. The priesthood, free and independent—are limited to the concerns of piety and morality; that the public conscience might not be perverted by the contingencies of peace and war, and other political events, which operate so largely on the moral sentiments and habits of mankind. On the other hand, the civil magistrate is left to pursue the national policy, under the censorship of the national conscience. How the balance was held between the civil and ecclesiastical powers, under the theocracy, this is not the place to enquire. But it is within the knowledge of every one, that to re-unite those functions, separated by God himself, has been the effort of all ages since. Hence, we see the magistrate swallowing up the priesthood: there, the priesthood engulphs the civil power: while either event is highly injurious to society; but the latter most.

But to return to our subject. As no priesthood existed previous to the days of Abraham, nor in his family, till the consecration of Aaron; as no evidence of divine origin can be produced in behalf of the heathenish priesthoods; and, as

we are assured that Melchisedec was a divinely constituted priest; it follows, that he was the first priest among men, and his the first priesthood. Let us, therefore, produce the evidence that this man had a divine appointment to the priest's office.

1. He is denominated כהן לעל צלן. Priest of the Most High God.

The term כהן, *Cohen*, has been considered by some, who are never to be named without respect, as a *sacred title*, and never applied to any who are not, in the *official sense*, priests. But the scriptural usage of the term establishes the contrary opinion. From that usage we collect that כהן, *Cohen*, is a title of *honour*, a *subordinate title*, and a title given equally to officers in *church*, and in *state*. Take the following proofs.

A list of the civil and ecclesiastical officers, in the days of David, is given, 2 Sam. viii., in which we notice this double application of this official title. Thus, Zadok and Ahimelech were כהנים, *Cohanim*; viz., of God, that is *Priests*, verse 17: and David's sons were כהנים, *Cohanim*; viz., of their father, that is, his *ministers of state*: verse 18.

A similar list is given, 2 Sam. xx. At that time Zadok and Abiathar were כהנים, *Cohanim*, Priests of God: and Ira, the Jairite, was כהן.

Cohen, to David; or, his *minister* of state: verse 26.

In 1 Kings iii., we have an account of the civil and ecclesiastical officers, in the reign of Solomon. At that time Zadok and Abiathar were כהנים, *Cohanim*, or priests of God: and Zabud, the son of Nathan, was כֹּהֵן רֵצָה הַמֶּלֶךְ, *Cohen*, &c., the king's confidential *minister* of state.

Further, it may be remarked that the verb כָּהַן, which associates with the above mentioned official title, is never used in the scriptures to express *civil* ministration. This is somewhat strange: as the title denotes equally a *civil*, or a *religious* minister; one would expect that the verb would equally signify civil, or religious ministration. This, it seems, is not the case. Yet, a person acquainted with the philosophy of language, will strongly suspect that the verb must have had an application of that sort, as well as the noun, though instances do not occur in the Bible. There, it uniformly signifies priestly ministration, except in Isaiah lxi. 10., where it has a highly figurative signification: the allusion, however, is to the priesthood.

Now, as the verb is never used to express ordinary, or servile labour: as the term כָּהַן, *Cohen*, is never used like עָבַד, *Enched*, as a term of voluntary humiliation: and, in fine, as it is the

title of the immediate ministers of God, and of sovereign princes; it is a title of *honour*. As it is never used in speaking of sovereign princes, but only of their ministers, or the ministers of God, it is a *subordinate* title. And the passages which have been quoted show that it belongs equally to officers in *church*, and in *state*.

Having fixed the meaning of this official title, this appears to be the proper place to consider a few passages of scripture, which, from the application of it, seem to create some embarrassment to our general doctrine of three divinely constituted priesthoods.

The priests of Egypt, כהנים, *Cohanim*; Gen. xlvii. 22; and Potiphar, כהן, *Cohen*, priest of On; Gen. xli. 45, 50—who were they? Priests of God, or ministers of Pharaoh? If they were priests of God, the idea of three divine priest-hoods must be given up. And even should we deny the divine origin of their priesthood, yet, if we admit them to be *priests* at all, we will find ourselves involved in some difficulty: for, as it is notorious, that the religious rites and officers of heathenism, were, in most instances copied from some antecedent divine institution; and, as the solitary instance of Melchisedec's priest-hood does not appear of sufficient celebrity to affect the organization of society in the sur-

rounding empires; will not the existence of an order of *priests* in Egypt, furnish presumptive evidence of an antecedent *divine* order of priests?

To this it is answered—that we have no evidence that Potiphar, and the other כהנים, *Cohanim*, in Egypt, were priests of God. We have evidence that they were *ministers* of Pharaoh. All history testifies that this class of men, in Egypt, were not mere ministers of religion: religion, in fact, was the least important of their functions. They were the philosophers, astronomers, surveyors, engineers, architects, historians, and instructors of the nation: in a word, all offices, dependent on learning, fell into their hands, as being the only persons qualified for them. The population of Egypt was divided into five classes, the priests, the soldiers, the shepherds, the husbandmen, and the artificers; of which, the former were continually about the person of the king, and employed in every business requiring superior knowledge: and, even religion itself, was quite a philosophical business among the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and other nations of the east. We are, therefore, without any good reason for believing that the priests of Egypt were either *priests of God*, or formed on any pre-existing divine model.

Jethro, priest of Midian, Moses's father-in-

law, who was he, a *prince*. or a *priest of God*? Not the latter: he is never so called: and as to his offering sacrifice, Exod. xviii. 12; the fact is irrelative to the question; as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, &c., offered sacrifices without being priests. On the other hand, the term כהן, *Cohen*, never being used as the title of a sovereign prince, but of the minister of a sovereign prince; such we believe to have been the station of Jethro.

The כהנים, *Cohanim*, mentioned in Exod. xix. 22. "And let the *priests* also, which come near unto the Lord, sanctify themselves; lest the Lord break forth upon them." What priests were these? A reference to chapter xxiv. 4, 5, 6, will furnish an answer to this enquiry. "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men, כהנים, *Cohanim*, of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings, of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar." These young men were the כהנים, *Cohanim*, or ministers of Moses, whom he employed in the servile part of sacrificing, reserv-

ing the noble part, the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood, to himself.

What is the meaning of that promise, Exod. xix. 6. "And ye shall be unto me," מַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ—“a kingdom of *priests*, and a holy nation?” Would it not seem as if the idea of *priestly consecration* was familiar to the people of Israel, previous to the Horeb covenant and institution of the Levitical priesthood?—I answer, no. The candid reader must admit, that to adopt the hypothesis of an antecedent priesthood well known to the Israelites, while he finds no such order of men among the tribes of Abraham, (and the solitary instance of Melchisedec was, in all probability, quite overlooked,) would be rash and unwarrantable. Without adopting so bold an hypothesis, the passage admits an easy interpretation, full of spirit and meaning, and perfectly consistent with the ascertained facts of ancient history. They had just left Egypt, where they had seen the priests occupy the most honourable station about the king, discharge the most important duties, and receive an ample reward for their services: and the passage of scripture under consideration may be viewed as alluding to that state of things, and as containing a promise that God, on being chosen king of the Israelitish nation, would

make them all as honourable and happy as the priests of Egypt.

To conclude this article of proof, it appears that Melchisedec was a priest of the Most High God, and the first man that ever bore that character ; or, indeed, enjoyed it at all till the consecration of Aaron and his sons.

II. Our second proof of his divine appointment is taken from the 110th psalm ; where Messiah is represented as constituted a priest after the order of Melchisedec ; which takes the priesthood of the latter as a settled point. The Jews, in order to get rid of the obnoxious doctrine of Messiah's priesthood, a doctrine which involves them in great embarrassment respecting the prerogatives of the tribes of Judah and Levi, insist on giving the term כֹּהֵן, *Cohen*, in this psalm, its civil sense. But the miserable gloss dethrones their Messiah. For if he be not the priest of God, *but* only the *minister* of an earthly prince, he ceases to be a sovereign, a king, on the throne of his father David. But take the passage in its obvious sense, and all is luminous and consistent. Messiah, a king on the throne of David, is Jehovah's כֹּהֵן, *Cohen*, or priest, after the similitude of Melchisedec, who was both a king and a priest.

III. Our third proof is found, Heb. v. i.

where Paul says that every high priest, λαμβανόμενος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, “being taken from among men is ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin.” And again he says, verse 4: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron.” Now as no man could be a priest without a divine appointment; and, as Moses, David, and Paul, testify that Melchisedec was a priest, it follows that he must have had a divine appointment to that office.

After delaying so long on the priesthood of Melchisedec, we will readily be excused from quoting the passages of scripture which prove that the priesthoods of Aaron and Jesus had a similar origin, especially as the proof, in both instances, is ample, obvious, and acquiesced in.

Previous however to dismissing the Aaronic priesthood, it may not be deemed superfluous to advert to a class of facts in the Jewish history, which seem to interfere with its constitutional privileges. The constitution runs thus: Numb. xviii. 7. “Thou and thy sons with thee” (the speech is addressed to Aaron) “shall keep your priest’s office for every thing of the altar and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest’s office unto you as a

service of gift: and the stranger" (that is a person not of the family of Aaron) "that cometh nigh" (to offer sacrifices, or do the priest's office) "shall be put to death." Upon this ground it was that the priests resisted king Uzziah, when he invaded their office; and God seconded them in defending their rights, by striking the king with leprosy, in the very act of usurpation. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21. Yet all this notwithstanding, we find frequent instances of persons who were not priests, offering up sacrifice, without opposition from men, and with the approbation of God: such as Samuel; 1 Sam. xvi. 2, &c. Gideon; Judges, vi. 24, &c. Elijah; 1 Kings xviii. 31, &c. But such instances did not at all interfere with the ordinary priesthood. God limited the children of Israel to the ministration of the sons of Aaron in the services of the altar: but he did not limit himself from commanding and accepting sacrifices from other hands. Inspiration furnished full powers. The sovereign of all has a right to demand the services of whom he pleases. But these extraordinary sacrificers are never called, nor considered, priests: any more than Abraham or Job.

Perhaps it may be thought that *more* time has been spent in establishing the position *that*

there never was more than three priesthoods, than either the importance of the fact in any view, or its connection with the object of this dissertation, will justify. A different opinion however was entertained. It was, indeed, perceived that were there a thousand priesthoods, still Melchisedec's *is*, and Aaron's *is not*, the pattern of Messiahs. But we endeavoured to establish the fact of there being only three priesthoods, not for the light which it casts on some passages of scripture, but because, though not *essential*, it is not *quite irrelevant* to our purpose. To perceive that this is the case, let the following remarks be considered. It will not be denied that if the reality, and nature, of Christ's priesthood be perceived and admitted, all ideas of typical patterns are superseded and useless. For the sole use of such patterns and analogies is to prove the fact of his priesthood, and explain the *nature* of his functions. When, in the days of king David, Messiah was to be exhibited to the Jewish nation as their *Priest*; the divine spirit had two priesthoods, either of which might have been brought forward as a *pattern*, viz. Melchisedec's and Aaron's. He chose the former, in preference to the latter, because it did *as well establish the fact*, that Messiah should be a priest, as the other could

do—And, at the same time warned against an error, to which that nation would one day be exposed. This idea will be fully evolved in a subsequent part of this discourse. I will only add, that there is little reason to doubt that in addition to the importance of Melchisedec's priesthood to his cotemporaries, a great and an essential end of its original institution was to have in reserve a *pattern*, by which, when Messiah should appear, his priesthood might be proven—while at the same time it was distinguished from the Levitical priesthood, with which it was foreseen that it would be confounded.

II. The second subject of enquiry is, in what sense Jesus is said to be a priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron.

† The first idea that strikes one, on hearing that one priest is after the order of another, is this—that they both have precisely the same rights and functions; and these functions the same efficacy. Thus, the high priests who succeeded Aaron, were of the same order with him: the office, its duties, and its efficacy, remained immutable; and descended pure and entire, like an estate equally incapable of waste and of augmentation. In this sense, Jesus was neither

of the order of Melchisedec, nor of Aaron. His priesthood was peculiar: his *sacrifice* was his *SOUL*: "neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us:"* his *intercession* is carried on in heaven: he "is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us."† Such a sacrifice neither Melchisedec nor Aaron ever offered; for, if they had, "the worshippers once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins."‡ In which event, Messiah's priesthood would have been unnecessary; for "where remission of sin is, there is no more offering for sin."§ It was the imperfection of the antecedent priesthoods that rendered his necessary: and had his been the very same with them, the imperfection must have continued. But he assumed a perfect priesthood, to which nothing was equal; a priesthood, which finished transgression, and made an end of sin. We must, therefore, search for some other idea of order.

The learned reader is not to be informed that the 4th verse of the 110th psalm admits, and

* Heb. ix. 12.

† Heb. ix. 24.

‡ Heb. x. 2.

§ Heb. x. 18.

has received, very different translations. To analyse and refute, or establish these, would be toil without profit. All the light we can hope to receive must come from the lamp of the apostle Paul. The passage alluded to runs thus:—

נשבע יהוה ולא ינחם אתה כהן לעולם על- דברת מלכי עֶדֶן	"The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent; Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec."
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The chief difficulty lies in the phrase קל-דברת, "after the ORDER." Paul's translation, which is also that of the Septuagint, is κατὰ τὴν τάξιν: and as to the idea which he affixed to τάξιν, we collect it from his own synonyme, chap. vii. 15., κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιοῦσιν τῷ Μελχισεδεκ. "After the SIMILITUDE of Melchisedec." There is another phrase, in the third verse, which also goes to fix the apostle's idea: Melchisedec is spoken of as one, ἀφωμοιωμένος τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, "made like unto the Son of God." Thus then Messiah was made a priest, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν, "after the order,"—that is, κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιοῦσιν, "after the similitude" of Melchisedec. Or, inverting the related ideas, Melchisedec, ἀφωμοιωμένος τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, "was constituted a similitude, or type, of the Son of God." TYPICAL SIMILITUDE, then, is the apostle's idea.

But here we are met by a question of some apparent difficulty. Was not Aaron, it may be

asked, a type of the Son of God : was there not a similitude between his and Messiah's priesthood : and, if so, was not Jesus a priest after the *similitude*, or *order* of Aaron, as well as after the *similitude*, or *order* of Melchisedec ?

The correctness of the assumption is admitted ; viz., that Aaron was a type, or similitude of Messiah, in his priestly character. He was "called of God :"* he was "taken from among men ;"† and, "ordained for men, in things pertaining to God ;"‡ he entered once a year into the most holy place, "not without blood ;"§ he served "unto the example, and shadow, of heavenly things ;"|| — The law, which had a shadow of good things to come, had not a single type of Messiah so illustrious as the high priest entering into the holiest of all, with the *blood of atonement*, and *incense of intercession*.

The literal fact is, both the priesthood of Aaron, and that of Melchisedec, were types of the priesthood of Christ : Aaron and Melchisedec, so far as their characters coincided, were types of equal value : both of them "priests of the Most High God ;" both "taken from among men, and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God ;" in sacrifice both shedding the blood

* Heb. v. 4.

† Heb. v. 1.

‡ Heb. v. 1.

§ Heb. ix. 7.

|| Heb. viii. 5.

of atonement, and both making intercession with God, and blessing his church. So far, + their typical character is perfectly equal; and so far, Jesus is a priest after the *similitude*, or, if you will, the *order* of Aaron as much as of Melchisedec. This is a fact, which can neither be evaded, nor invalidated. It is a miserable species of criticism, that would sacrifice fact to verbiage.

But why then is Messiah represented as a priest after the order of Melchisedec? The reason is as follows. Melchisedec possessed all the typical characteristics of Aaron; but, in addition to these, he had sundry *peculiar characteristics*: now the priesthood of Jesus, which tallied exactly with all the typical characteristics of Melchisedec's, must be different from the priesthood of Aaron. So definitely were these peculiarities marked, that every candid and judicious observer must, on seeing him, exclaim, here is a priest, who is not an *Aaronic priest*! This distinction of the priesthood of Jesus from the priesthood of Aaron is a most important point: to mark that distinction was the chief, perhaps I might say, the sole end of the type, and the sole end of the apostle's argument. These ideas will be illustrated in the two subsequent articles.

III. Why was Jesus exhibited in prophecy as a priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not after the order of Aaron?

If, as has been proved above, *order* means *similitude*; and if, as has also been proved, Jesus was after the *similitude*, or *order* of Aaron, as well as of Melchisedec; the Holy Spirit might with perfect truth have spoken of him, as a priest after the order of Aaron. Why was this not done? This question has important connections with the general subject of this dissertation; and, as we do not recollect to have seen it discussed, we beg the indulgence of some detail.

1. We say then, that Melchisedec's priesthood was not made the exemplar of Christ's, by the Spirit of prophecy, because they were both the same priesthood—for we have proved them to be *essentially* different.

2. Nor, because priest Melchisedec bore an exclusive resemblance to priest Messiah, for the contrary has been proved.

3. Considerations wholly moral led to this exhibition. When David was directed to foretell that Messiah should be a priest, the Holy Spirit looked forward to the time when he should be revealed to the Jewish nation, and calculated the reception which such a priest

might expect from that people. It was foreseen to what a pitch of vanity, their self-preference, or, as it is called, nationality, after having been accumulated by so many peculiar blessings, and nursed by such numerous interpositions of the Deity in their behalf, would carry the Jewish nation. It was foreseen that there was not one of their national institutions, on which they would set a more exorbitant value, than on their priesthood: this, by the atonement which it made for sin, would be viewed as the complement of that righteousness in which they would trust: and, being so often denominated an everlasting priesthood by their sacred writers, they could imagine no less than that it should be interminable; and that God would never consecrate another priesthood, at least for them. In a word, the nation was foreseen wholly engrossed with its typical priesthood.

4 If then Messiah had been foretold as a priest after the *order* of Aaron; or, had he been foretold as a priest without *specification of order*; the Jews, according to their ideas of priesthood, could have anticipated nothing else than an *Aaronic* priest. It is true that this inference of theirs would be a logical *non-sequitur*; for it does not follow that every priest must be an *Aaronic* priest; nay, had Messiah been foretold

as a priest after the *order* of Aaron, it would not follow that he should have the very *same* priesthood with Aaron; even as it does not follow from his being after the *order* of Melchisedec, that he has the very *same* priesthood with that man. But the Spirit of God does not deal with men upon the presumption that they will always reason justly. There is a moral logic, in which *prejudices* occupy the place of principles. And the Jewish prejudice on the subject of priesthood was foreseen.—It was foreseen that, in the age of Messiah, the Jewish nation would not be able to form any idea of a priesthood distinct from the Aaronic priesthood. And, of consequence, if he were foretold as a *priest*, they would expect an *Aaronic* priest. Let us suppose for a moment, that the phrase, AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHISEDEC, were omitted in the prophecy contained in the 110th psalm. The passage would then read thus:—

“Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent—
thou art a priest for ever.”

Now, be it remembered, that this oath is given to the son of David. What could the Jews, take them as they are, with all their prejudices on the subject of priesthood about them; what could they make of this prophecy? Nothing at all. Every argument which proved

Messiah to be a *son* of David—proved him to be no priest; because, no son of Aaron. And, every argument which proved him to be a *priest*—proved him no son of David. For them to have so much as an idea of such a personage, was neither more nor less than an impossibility.

Against this dilemma the Spirit of God guards them, in the 110th psalm. On the one hand, Messiah is to be the Son and Lord of David, and king on his father's throne.—On the other hand, he is constituted by the oath of God a *priest*. What sort of priest? A priest after the order, or similitude, of Melchisedec; and this Melchisedec was a king-priest, and had nothing to do with the blood of Levitical genealogy, nor with the priesthood entailed on that blood. Such a priest, therefore, as was after the order of Melchisedec, must be totally different from the priests of Levi. Thus, the whole and sole end of this prophecy is to exhibit Messiah as a priest,—and to distinguish him from the Aaronic priests.

The foregoing argument would derive additional interest from the ascertainment of one point. I feel strongly inclined to put it into round assertion; but, perhaps, some may prefer the modesty of interrogation. I ask, then, if the 110th psalm be not the first explicit reve-

lation of Messiah's priesthood? That he was exhibited, in antecedent prophecies, as a *prophet*, and as a *prince*, is acknowledged. That he should *suffer severely* in bruising the serpent's head, was apparent from the first revelation ever made of him. And the typical rite of sacrifice might suggest that he should be a *victim*. But was all this sufficient to exhibit him in the character of a *priest*? I think not. And who before David ever described him as a priest? If these views be correct, they communicate an edge to the argument we have been urging. For it will then appear, that in the very first exhibition of his son, as the church's high priest, God drew a decisive line of distinction between him and the existing order of priests, with whom there was danger of confounding him—that when he appeared, he might be recognised as a priest, who by "*one offering*" should for ever perfect them that are sanctified. Alas for blind erring mortals! All this precaution was insufficient: as will appear in the following article.

IV. The fourth and last question is — why did Paul find it necessary to argue this subject so pertinaciously with the Jews?

I dare appeal to the candid examiner of the scriptures, whether he has not found the vii.

chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews distressingly minute and tedious. So many profiles of the same subject are turned round to us; so many arguments heaped together to prove a point, in our view of it, self-evident; every possible objection stated, every possible answer given: a doubting Jew can invent no new difficulty, Christian ingenuity can devise no new argument: every ray of light is collected, the apostle has left nothing for those who may come after him. An argument, managed in this manner, on a subject where we are already in possession of the truth, is the most exhausting thing, that can be imagined to the human intellect. Unquestionably, Paul would never have written in this style to the present Christian church. Unquestionably, there must have been some extraordinary derangement of ideas in the Jewish nation, and among the Christian part of it, to render such a style proper, and necessary for them. And this is the fact. And the wisdom of the divine Spirit shines in suiting his communications to the minds which are to be enlightened by them.

However unexpected the fact, yet from the apostolic writings it appears to be a fact, that the opposition to our Lord's priesthood, which racked and tore the Christian church, under the

eyes, and under the ministrations, of the apostles, was exclusively the work of Israelites. Did a Jew hesitate to believe? Christ crucified was the stumbling-block: I. Cor. 1. 23.* Did he apostatise? It was by denying our Lord's priesthood; it was by crucifying to himself afresh the Son of God, and putting him to an open shame. Heb. vi. 6. It was by treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing. Heb. x. 29. With respect to the Gentiles, the case was different. Idolatries, drunkenness, revellings, lusts, and philosophy, falsely so called, were their besetting sins; the obstructions to their conversion, and the incentives to their apostasy. This distinction between Jewish and Gentile character is perfectly consonant to the principles of human nature. It is precisely what we ought to expect from the natural and necessary operation of those principles, under the respective moral circumstances alluded to. For, limiting the illustration to the case of apostasy, however

* The phraseology of this passage is worthy of notice; Christ crucified was to Gentiles *foolishness*, they could not well comprehend the doctrine of salvation by his sufferings. The Jews understood the doctrine of vicarious sufferings, but confined it to their legal atonement; and, therefore, to them Christ's sacrifice became a *stumbling-block*.

strongly a converted heathen might be tempted to relapse into his former debaucheries, there was little danger of his relapsing into his ancient religion. It was impossible for him to unlearn, what he had already learned of the futility of idolatry, and all the rites and mummeries of heathenism. To these, he never could trust his soul. His apostasy from Christianity, therefore, was rather a relapse into his former lusts, than a return to his former religion. Not so with the Jew. The moment he began, from whatever cause, to waver in his Christian profession, his mind was irresistibly attracted towards his ancient religion: a religion, which he knew to be divine; which he was sure had saved his fathers; which had a divine atonement for sin, offered up yearly, weekly, daily, almost incessantly; and a divine order of priests to make it: a religion of consequence, in his view of it, to which he might safely trust his soul. Hence, an apostatising Jewish Christian always fled directly to the horns of the ancient altar. Of this assertion it may be esteemed sufficient proof to refer generally to the epistle to the Galatians; take, however, the following quotation:—"If righteousness come by the *law*, then *Christ is dead* in vain. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should

not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth *crucified* among you? This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the *works of the law*, or by the *hearing of faith*? Are ye so foolish, having *begun in the Spirit*, are ye now made perfect by the *flesh*?”*

Now, Paul had repeatedly refuted the erroneous notions of his countrymen concerning the efficacy of Christ's death: sometimes addressing himself to the unbelievers among them, sometimes attacking apostates, sometimes instructing weak and doubting Christians. It would seem his labours had not the desired effect. This question, however, must be put to rest for ever, or Christianity perish among the race of Abraham. Paul, accordingly, writes this epistle professedly on the subject of our Lord's priesthood, and inscribes it to the Jews, where it was most needed.

The precision and minuteness of the apostle's argumentation is exactly suited to an important

* Gal. ii. 21.—iii. 1, 2, 3. *Jesus crucified* had been set before them; they had adopted the new dispensation, or, *begun in the Spirit*, and had received the Holy Ghost, as the seal of their faith.—But they had got infatuated; turned back to the law, or were made perfect by the *flesh*; and by trusting in the righteousness of the law, practically declared that in their opinion *Christ had died in vain*.

subject, which had long been tortured by popular debate. Such a subject will ever be warped and entangled with the mistakes and sophistries of the wise and the unwise: and, by the natural affinities of the human mind, will be incorporated with all the partialities and passions of those who have entered with zeal into the discussion. To handle such a subject well is no easy task.

Those who are acquainted with the genius of Paul's writings will scarcely doubt that every paragraph in the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews contains an answer to some popular objection. The remark is equally applicable to several other parts of the epistle. It is a notorious principle of this man's logical discussions, not always to state the error which he refutes. But we may, in many instances at least, ascertain the sophistries which were floating through society, from the answers which he has given them. Thus, when we find him arguing so strenuously that the law had only a *shadow* of good things to come, that it was *impossible* the blood of bulls and of goats should *take away sin*, that perfection could not be by the *Levitical priesthood*;—we may be sure that the Jews had urged that they were *already* possessed of an atonement, *prescribed* in their law, and had a *divine order of priests* to make

that atonement. When we hear him alleging the oath of God, that Jesus should be a *priest*, and after the *order of Melchisedec*, not of Aaron—who will doubt that the Jews had pleaded, that Jesus could not be a *priest*, because *not of Aaron's family*. In fine, when we consider his laboured and artful introduction, and the minuteness of his argument, we feel sure that this subject was δυσσεμμενυτον, hard to be explained, to the satisfaction of Israelites.

“As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man;” and so the different aspects of affairs in human society. Almost every reader will be able to recollect some subject, which he has seen invade and agitate the public mind. Men and women, old and young, enter the lists of argument with equal ardour: the whole community converted in a day, into litigious disputants. After the subject has been puzzled and confounded out of all intelligibility; when what was clear has become obscure, what was certain, dubious; when fact and fiction, when sophism and argument, are at a dead match; and nought remains to the litigants, save their original zeal, and growing animosity; then, perhaps, he may have seen a wise man come forward to settle the debate. But, what a mortifying task! How was he to prove, what

ought to be conceded? How many trifles, light as air, must he honour with a formal refutation! and how often must he meet the same sophism, dressed up in new habiliments, and insisting on once more trying the fate of battle? Let not those who stand aloof, pronounce that man tedious. Such precisely was Paul's case.

Here closes the second part of our dissertation. The question is, no doubt, a Jewish one. To us, the apostle's argument is far from being so interesting as it was to those for whom he wrote. It may be questioned, if one of a million of Christians now living, ever conceived any incongruity between our Lord's tribe and priesthood. In the general theme, however, our interest is not small. On the priesthood and atonement of Jesus rest all our hopes of life everlasting. Would Paul have so pleaded for a *nullity*, or a mere *figure of speech*!

PART III.

WE have at length arrived where the reader probably long since wished to find us. We enter on the analysis of the vii. chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. The nature of our discourse forbids us to follow the apostle step by step, in the manner of a commentator. By bringing together the different parts of his discourse, under the different heads to which they belong, we hope to give perspicuity and distinctness to each of them. We hold ourselves bound to give every phrase, and word, quoted, (and every phrase, and word, essential to the argument shall be quoted) the precise meaning which it bears in the Apostle's discourse. And then such of our readers as choose to incur the trouble may apply our interpretations to the subjects as they lie in the sacred text. Should we succeed, we will have furnished a real commentary.—The following are our topics:

I. Melchisedec's person.

II. His royalty and kingdom, so far as they were typical.

III. The extraordinary terms in which the apostle speaks of him: viz, "without father," &c.

IV. The duration of his priesthood.

V. Its dignity.

VI. A comparison of the typical priesthood of Melchisedec, with the antitypical priesthood of Jesus.

I. Who was Melchisedec?

Led away by the mere *sound* of words, commentators have formed the most extravagant ideas of this personage. To mention and refute their hypotheses will gratify curiosity; it will, besides, expose the danger of *mysticism* in interpreting the scriptures. The utmost brevity shall be studied.

I. Some will have Melchisedec to be an *Angel*.

But this is absurd. 1. Because the scriptures never ascribe the priestly office to an angel. 2. Because they teach that every priest is taken from among men. 3. Because, were he an angel, it would be mere *trifling* to tell us he was without mother; *false* to assert he was without beginning of days; *useless* to inform us he was without end of life; and absolute *impertinence* to assure us that his genealogy was not reckoned from the priests of Levi.

2. Some say he is the *Holy Ghost*.

But this is still more intolerable. 1. Because the Holy Ghost is never represented as a priest: and his office, in the economy of redemption, looks toward *men*, whom he sancti-

fies ; whereas, the priest's office looks towards *God*, to whom atonement and intercession are made. 2. Because he is never exhibited as a type of Christ. 3. Because, granting the hypothesis, we would then have two *equal* priests : and yet one of them would have no *offering*, and of course could make no *intercession*, not being qualified to enter into the holy place with blood. 4. It would be worse than nonsense to tell us the Holy Ghost is without *father* or *mother*, and does not reckon his *genealogy* from the Aaronic priests.

3. Some insist that he is none other than the *Son of God* himself, who assuming the *appearance*, or *reality*, of humanity, exhibited to Abraham an early picture of his future priesthood.

This is all over contemptible.—1. Because every high priest is taken from among men ; the *appearance* of humanity is not enough.—2. Because, if he was at that time a priest, and discharged the duties of his office, he must have “suffered often,” (twice) “from the beginning of the world ;” and not “by the once offering up of himself, have for ever perfected them who are sanctified :” then, moreover, Abraham would have received the promised blessing, contrary to the scriptures : and, in fine, the appearance of the Son of God, as the Son of Mary, was superfluous. If, to avoid those absurdities, it

be alleged that though he appeared as a priest, he did not discharge the duties of his office: then, in the first place, he is degraded into a mere pageant, an officer without functions: and, in the second place, he is stripped of all typical character; for the priest who neither *sacrifices*, nor *intercedes*, can never be a type of one who does *both*.—3. Because, if Melchisedec was the Son of God, whether in real humanity, or only in its appearance, *he* must have been a type of *himself*; the ideas of *identity* and *similarity* are confounded; and Paul, instead of saying, *απομορφωσις τῷ θεῷ ὅτι υἱός*, that he was “made like to the Son of God,” should have said, *ὁ υἱὸς ὁ θεὸς ὁ υἱός*, that he was the Son of God.—4. Because it would be unworthy the manly sense of Paul, to say nothing of *inspiration*, to labour through a long dissertation to prove a mere truism, which it would disgrace an idiot to utter, and insult a child to offer for information; namely, that Messiah’s priesthood was very like itself.—6. Because it would be extremely irreverent to suppose that the adorable God lifted up his hand and swore, that his Son’s priesthood should be like his Son’s priesthood. An indetical proposition does not require such a solemn confirmation. But enough: proof is complete when absurdity is exposed.

Melchisedec was a MAN.

This follows from what has been said. But, if the reader should prefer direct evidence, to an inference from negative propositions, it is an easy matter to gratify him. For,

1. The *historical* evidence is complete. We have the same evidence to believe that Melchisedec was a man, as that Abraham and the king of Sodom were men. By what plea is such evidence to be set aside?

2. His priesthood proves his humanity. For if, as the apostle says, Heb. v. 1., every high priest be taken from among men, this high priest must be a man.

3. As all the other personal types of Messiah were men, so must this personal type. And, indeed, it is altogether inconceivable, how a being, not possessed of human nature, should be a type of priest Messiah, *in* human nature.

4. The apostle's argument requires, on many accounts, that Melchisedec should be a man: for instance, if he were not a man, but the Son of God, the Holy Ghost, or an angel, (for other supposition is inconceivable,) why should Paul call his brethren to *behold* and *admire* his superiority over Abraham?

But, perhaps, too much, on so very plain a subject. No reader, not far gone in criticism, ever did imagine, from the scriptural account of

him, that Melchisedec was any thing else than a man. Some phrases in the 7th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, owing, in reality, to an imperfect translation, may puzzle a common reader. Of these he will say, "*Si non vis intelligi nolo ego intelligere*," if you will not be understood, I shall not understand you. But still he will adhere to it, that Melchisedec was a human being. Let what will be dark, this is clear. It is reserved for the affected ingenuity of spurious criticism, to affix a random meaning to obscure phrases, and then to make the plainest language forego its sense in favour of the hypothesis. Pranks of this kind, not a few, have been played on the subject under consideration. Hence, the labour of interpretation has been increased on our hands. Be this the apology of minuteness.

One more enquiry on this head remains. What particular man was Melchisedec? Enoch — Shem — Ham — Canaan — a Canaanitish prince—a descendant of Japhet—Job? Each of these conjectures has had its advocates, not one of them has a particle of evidence, and it would be a waste of time and toil, to sit down to weigh the respective merits of unsupported conjectures. The fact is, we do not know, and we do not care, who he was.

II. Of his royalty and kingdom.

Heb. vii.

1. οὗτος γὰρ ὁ Μελχισέ-
δεκ βασιλεὺς Σαλήμ,
ἱερεὺς Ἰεφθὲ υψίστου.—2.
πρωτὸν μὲν ἑρμηνευόμενος
βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης,
επειτα δὲ καὶ βασιλεὺς
Σαλήμ, ὁ ἐστὶ βασιλεὺς
εἰρηνης.

1. "For this Melchisedec,
king of Salem, priest of the
Most High God.—2. First, be-
ing by interpretation, *king of*
righteousness; and after that,
also king of Salem, which is,
king of peace."

We have here a Greek translation of the name of Melchisedec, and of the name of the city where he reigned: both, therefore, are brought into the typical group.

In the Hebrew tongue מלך, Melech, signifies *king*, and צדק, Zedek, *righteousness*: and the name מלך צדק, Melchisedec, signifies *king of righteousness*, or *righteous king*. If the character of this prince corresponded with his name, (which is to be supposed,) his government must have been distinguished by righteousness. And thus he is, both in *name* and *conduct*, a noble similitude of that king, whom God ordained to reign in righteousness over Zion. Whether his name was θεοπνευστον, or immediately imposed by God; or whether, under the direction of Providence, it was given him by his parents in hope that his conduct would realise the title; or by his subjects, or the neighbouring nations, as an honorary reward for his political justice, we know not. Be these things as they may, the

apostle, by interpreting the name, has taught us that it is typical. And yet we do not assert that the royalty and righteousness of this man, separately viewed, constituted him a type of Messiah; but viewed in connection with his priesthood, they did. *A righteous king-priest* was an illustrious type of Messiah.

This man was also מלך-שלם, Melech-Salem, *king of peace*. It may be questioned whether this was not, like the former, a name of the man: in which view he would be called Melechsaalem, from his pacific policy; as he was called Melchisedec for his righteous administration. The general opinion however is that שלם, Salem, was the name of his city: and the opinion has this much in its favour, that David uses Melchisedec as the name of the man, and not Melechsaalem. Be it then the name of his city: for nothing can be gained by farther criticism. This name in the Hebrew language signifies *peace*, and the apostle's translating it, proves it typical. We ventured to presume that Melchisedec's *conduct* corresponded with *his name*: may we not also risk a conjecture that the *condition* of Salem corresponded with *its name*. The *language* would then correspond with the *facts*, and both would be typical. Melchisedec a *righteous king*, reigning over Salem, a *peaceful city*, and being at the same time *Priest*

of the *Most High God*, was an excellent type of that *High Priest*, who reigns in righteousness, over the *peaceful city* of our God.

But whatever may have been the *conduct* of Melchisedec, or *condition* of his city ; the association of the *two titles* belongs to the essence of the type. They are the two eyes of the picture, concentrating their vision on the same object. *A righteous king* and a *peaceful city* ! in the type, and in the antitype. This is that natural connection between cause and effect, which the Creator has established in the constitution of human things : the natural connection between virtue and happiness, which it is the business of his moral government to maintain. Truth, however, extorts the reluctant concession, and it issues from the lips in a sigh drawn deep from the bottom of the heart, that the most righteous governor, and peaceably inclined community, may, through the violence of foreign aggression, be compelled to unsheath the defensive sword. Still political justice extinguishes half the causes of war, by forbearing those injuries which provoke retaliation. Whether it be considered as the natural tendency of things, or be rather viewed as the earthly retribution which God, for the encouragement of virtue, grants to righteousness in the present

world, the fact is certain, and the decree divine, "That the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." It is a truth which no squeamish delicacy may modify, no sinister motive repress, that the permanency of warlike character in a nation, rarely, if ever, results from the infelicity of its situation; but from its injustice. And they have their reward. Let them drink down their cup of blood and tears, poisoned with deadly guilt: this is but the beginning of their sorrows.

III. Of the extraordinary terms in which the apostle speaks of Melchisedec: viz., *without father, &c.*

The terms alluded to are, indeed, but few. And the difficulty in ascertaining their meaning has arisen entirely from considering them detachedly from the drift of the apostle's argument, and from synonymous phrases which fix their signification beyond all reasonable question. Paul's design is to prove that as Melchisedec, who was constituted the *pattern* of priest Messiah, was wholly distinct from the priests of Aaron's family, so of consequence must Jesus be. In effecting this design, he proves, first, that Melchisedec was in reality a priest: ἱερεὺς ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, priest of the Most High God. No argu-

ment against the reality of his priesthood could be ventured without contradicting both Moses and David. The next point, is to prove that this priest had nothing to do with the Jewish order of priest. This fact certainly was plain enough: yet the apostle states it, repeats it again and again, and expresses it in all possible variety of phrase; obviously with no other view than to keep it so long before the eyes of the Jews, that they should be compelled to admit that there was, and must be, a priesthood different from the Jewish priesthood. If that fact was once believed, the rest of his argument would give him little trouble. In the following passage he expresses the fact in terms as simple and plain as mortal man could use. Heb. vii. 11, 15. "If, therefore, perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken, pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is

yet far more evident, for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest." Never was language more perspicuous and definite. There was a priest, Melchisedec, totally distinct from the Aaronic priest—It was foretold that Messiah should arise after the order of that priest, and not after the order of Aaron—That he should be of the tribe of Judah, of consequence not a Levitical priest—And therefore perfection was not by the Levitical priesthood, &c. &c., and as the priesthood was changed, so also must be the law.

Of so much consequence is the fact of Melchisedec's distinct priesthood: and in such plain terms does the apostle state it, and argue from it. Yet in another part of his discourse he states *this self-same fact*, in terms, which have created amazing confusion of ideas, and subjected his whole discourse to the imputation of mystery and darkness, with what justice, it may be premature to say: the sequel perhaps may determine. The passage is as follows.

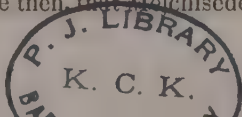
Heb. vii. 3.

Ἀπατρις, ἀμητωρ, ἀγενεαλογητος, μητε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν, μητε τέλος ἡμερῶν.

"Without father, without mother, without descent, (genealogy,) having neither beginning of days nor end of life."

1. In interpreting these phrases some have imagined, that the apostle intended to deny that Melchisedec had any HUMAN DESCENT. The expressions *απατωρ*, without father; *αμητωρ*, without mother; *αγενεαλογητος*, without descent; *μητε αρχην ημερων*, *μητε ζωης τελος εχων*, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; have been supposed to import that Melchisedec had neither *Father*, nor *Mother*; nor *birth*, nor *death*: in plain terms, that he was not a *human being*; but, (the only remaining suppositions) an *angel*, the *Holy Ghost*, or the *Son of God*. These conjectures have been weighed in the balance: and *Tekel* is their indelible brand.

2. Some have thought that Paul simply denies to Melchisedec PRIESTLY SUCCESSION.—It is true, that Melchisedec had neither *predecessor*, nor *successor*, in his priesthood; whereas, the Jewish priesthood had a succession of priests: it is also true, that this circumstance did constitute him, in preference to any Jewish priest, a type of Messiah, ch. vii. 23, 24. But it is just as true, that the apostle makes no allusion in the third verse, to that fact. Try the idea, and see how far it will go. Melchisedec was without predecessor or successor. It is a most natural and common figure, to call predecessors in office our fathers: let it be then, that Melchisedec was



απατῶρ, without father, that is, without a *predecessor in his priesthood*. But what shall we do with ἀμήτωρ, without mother? Was she intended for his *successor*, or for another *predecessor*, in the priesthood? If she could neither be his predecessor, nor his successor, why was her name introduced? This blows up the whole hypothesis. However, let us go to the other phrases: μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν, μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, must, according to the hypothesis, mean that his priesthood had neither beginning nor end. A strange human priesthood, a strange type! But the fact is, his priesthood had both a beginning and an end: and we must not so interpret the apostle as to make him assert a most unfeasible falsehood.

3. A third hypothesis is this, namely, a negation of HUMAN GENEALOGY. As this seems at first sight to have some features of verisimilitude, let us examine it a little. From its derivation, and use, γενεαλογία, genealogy, means a register of a man's descent: γενεαλογητός, is of course a man whose name is entered in some genealogical register: and ἀγενεαλογητός is a man whose name is not entered in any such register. Now, say some, Melchisedec is ἀγενεαλογητός, without genealogy, because we do not find his name in the genealogical registers of the Bible: the scriptures are

silent as to his father's name, his mother's name, his birth and his death. And this silence of scripture constitutes him a type of Christ. Neither will this do. For:

1. It erects a mere *negation*, a *blank*, a *nothing*, into a type. This is so *entirely a type* that it is nothing else. All the other types have an individual essence, and answered important purposes in their respective ages, besides their typical reference. But here is a type, which is nothing but a type. In the whole range of types, is there such another?

2. But the grand objection is that admitting the hypothesis, the type and antitype clash and contradict each other in every point and particular: Melchisedec, the type, is *without* genealogy; his father and mother, his birth and his death, are all *unknown*. Jesus, the antitype *has* a genealogy, Matthew gives us his genealogy in one line of ancestry, Luke in another: a double genealogy. He is therefore not without genealogy. He is not *απατωρ*, without father, nor *αμητωρ*, without mother, on record. If you enquire of his race, he was of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David; God was his father in heaven, and Joseph bore a father's name, and discharged a father's duty, among men; and as to his mother, she is

known over all Christendom to have been Mary. Moreover, his "beginning of days" and "end of life," or his *birth* and *death*, are recorded with a circumstantial precision almost as extraordinary as their importance. Here is no type, no similitude whatever, but visible and tangible contrast all over.

But there is yet something more extraordinary still. Assuming, what never can be proved, that the *silence* of the scriptures respecting the parentage, birth and death of Melchisedec, that is that a *mere blank*, can constitute a *type*: the difficulty is to find the analogous particulars in Messiah. The argument of the foregoing paragraph seems to indicate that the task will not be an easy one. It has however been attempted. And an hypothesis, so out of the common track of thought, has been found out, that its very extravagance seems to astonish us into belief. It is this. That as Melchisedec is without *father*, *mother*, *birth* or *death*, recorded in scripture, so Jesus is really without father *as man*, and without *mother*, *birth*, or *death*, as God. It is perfectly understood that the shadow of disrespect to the great names, which have lent their sanction to this interpretation, would be highly indecorous, and equally fatal to the presumption which should offer it. And, verily no disrespect

is felt, or intended, towards men, whom genius, piety, and public services have consecrated to the admiration and love of the Christian commonwealth. But truth has prior claims : and it is no disrespect to any one to withhold assent where evidence is not furnished. We therefore must refuse credence to this singular hypothesis.

1. Because, as the human genealogy of our Lord is sufficiently recorded, the word *γενεαλογετος*, without genealogy, must relate to his divinity : and then the apostle's language amounts to, neither more nor less, than, that *genealogical records are not kept in heaven*. If this sentiment should appear improper to the reader, let him reflect that the impropriety lies wholly in the *idea*, and not in any misjudged and indecorous quceriness of expression, which on so solemn a subject would be less indecent than criminal. On earth our Lord *had* a genealogy ; if he was *without* genealogy, it must be *above*. I cannot believe this to be an inspired idea. And the next is like it. For :

2. The idea of God's being *without a mother*, is not like that weight of wisdom, which drops from inspired lips. It is a truth, but surely not one worth the telling ; not so dark in the days of David and Paul, as to need being prefigured by types, or illuminated by dissertation.

After all, if both the above extremely awkward expressions, in the sense given to them, be put together, they amount to just this, that Messiah is *God*. This indeed was a doctrine which Paul laboured to establish: and mark what mighty weapons he wields in that warfare. It is the perfections of the deity which Jesus displays—it is his creation of the universe—his government, and final disposition of the universe—his superiority over all creatures—and the lofty terms, inapplicable to a creature, in which his father speaks of him—these, and such as these, are the apostle's arguments for the Deity of his Lord. And who can believe, that from this elevation, worthy of an inspired man, and worthy of such a theme, he would stoop down to the miserable puniness of telling the church that her Saviour, the Son of God, had as God, no mother; had no genealogical register in the Archives of heaven!

3. I object to the interpretation, because it does not treat the type and antitype on the *same principle* of illustration. The apostle speaks of a genealogy, parentage, birth and death which a priest *might* have; and denies that Melchisedec had them. The interpretation speaks of a genealogy and parentage, with respect to Jesus, which were *impossible*. Now the true, and only

true, principle of interpretation is to deny *the very SAME genealogy, parentage, birth and death* to both Christ and Melchisedec. But to change the terms, and deny *one species* of parentage and genealogy to the one, and a *different species* of genealogy and parentage to the other, is to get rid of the very *idea* of a type.

It is what logicians call an argument "on all fours;" or a syllogism with four terms: as if one should say, John has *money*, and Thomas has *wisdom*: therefore—nothing. Melchisedec has no *register* of his parentage, birth and death, Messiah has no *parentage, birth or death*: therefore—nothing. You cannot infer from the premises whether they are *like*, or *unlike* each other; whether they are *different* persons, or the *same* person.

It is somewhat worthy of observation into what a vortex one wrong idea will hurl the greatest minds. Some after affirming that it is the silence of the scriptures respecting the genealogy of Melchisedec, which constitutes him a type of Messiah; proceed the next moment to tell us who he was, and who was his father; and frequently pitch upon men, whose genealogy can be traced to Adam. There are not wanting others to rebuke their audacious attempt: and

to remind them, that to seek after the purposely concealed genealogy of this man, is nothing less than an effort to defeat the divine wisdom, to contradict the divine Spirit, and to destroy a glorious type of Messiah ! Let all this zeal cool down. For should the autograph of Melchisedec's genealogical register be produced ; or should an angel descend and certify us of his father and mother ; and of the year, month, day and hour, on which he was born ; and of those, on which he died ; it would not affect a single point in his typical character, nor discredit a single scriptural expression respecting him. It would in fact be the best possible commentary on Paul's language ; it would verify the whole of his argument : for it would prove that Melchisedec was not an Aaronic priest—had no genealogy among those priests—which is the very fact the apostle asserts. For—

LEVITICAL GENEALOGY

Is what the apostle denies to Melchisedec ; and of consequence *Levitical priesthood*. The very SAME genealogy he denies to Jesus ; verses 13, 14,—and with it Levitical priesthood, chap. viii. 4. And this was one point of similitude between

them, that both were priests, and neither of them an Aaronic priest. But to proceed with the analysis.

It is customary with the inspired writers, when they introduce a difficulty, to leave a key appended to the lock : it is scarcely less customary for their interpreters to neglect that key, and to go to the laboratories of learning and criticism, to have one forged ; which, (when they have got it,) grates in the lock and discomposes its wards, but never will open it. The apostle has left his own key to this passage ; if indeed, which I very much doubt, he considered it as containing a difficulty. What we need as a key, and therefore may call it by that name, is found in the 6. verse, ὁ δὲ μὴ γενεαλογουμένος ἐξ αὐτῶν, “he whose genealogy is not reckoned from *them* ; viz., the sons of Levi who received the office of priesthood. This then is the whole matter, a negation of Levitical genealogy. Melchisedec, says Paul, is ἀγενεαλογητός, without genealogy :—that is, μὴ γενεαλογουμένος ἐξ αὐτῶν, without Levitical genealogy.

But what shall we do with ἀπατωρ, ἀμητωρ, μητερ, ἡμερῶν, μητε ζῶης τέλος ἔχων. “Without father, without mother, without beginning of days or end of life ?” I answer, this is nothing else

than a circumstantial verbal description of a Levitical genealogical register.

The following diagram may serve to convey an idea of such register.

NAME.	FATHER'S NAME.	MOTHER'S NAME.	BIRTH.	DEATH.
M.	C.	D.	P.	E.

that is, M—; Son of C—, and D—; born P—; died E—

Turn over all the genealogical registers of Levi, and you will not find Melchisedec's name, *αγενεαλογητος*, he is, "without genealogy: nor his father's name, he is *απατωρ*, "without father:" nor his mother's name, he is *αμητωρ*, "without mother:" and both the column containing the register of births, and that containing the register of deaths, are empty; *μητε αρχην ημερων, μητε ζωης τελος εχων*, "having neither beginning of days nor end of life;" neither his birth, nor death are recorded in those registers. If I be not egregiously mistaken, the above interpretation carries evidence along with it, which will commend itself to the candid mind. Lest however it should be considered as only one of the many

fancies, which have been broached on this passage, a few remarks shall be made on each of the foregoing particulars.

It is by no means insinuated, or supposed, that the diagram submitted to the reader is anything like a *fac-simile* of a Levitical genealogical register. But it shall be proved that every one of the above particulars did enter into those registers, in whatever particular form they may have been kept: it shall also be proved that no man, in any case whatever, could be admitted to the priesthood, without producing his genealogical register. And from these facts any one can infer, that to assert a man had no Levitical genealogy, was the same thing as to assert he was not a Levitical priest.

1. A genealogical register, produced from the official records of the family of Levi, was the *only* evidence by which a man's right to officiate as a priest, could be established. A pregnant proof of this fact we have, Ezra ii. 61—63. "And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz; the children of Barzillai: which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was called after their name; these sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they

were not found; therefore, were they as polluted put from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim."

This happened after a captivity of 70 years; and after the disorders and mischances unavoidable in the deportation and return of the nation; circumstances, which must have proved fatal to many documents public and private. Yet under these circumstances, which made the case, what is called a *hard case*, a *genealogical register* is exacted as the *only admissible evidence* of a right to the priesthood: and a failure taking place with regard to the production of that evidence, these men of acknowledged priestly descent, are "as polluted put from the priesthood:" and because the *legal evidence* could not be produced, no human power could grant redress; and they must submit to the privation till a priest should arise with Urim and Thummim, who might bring the case before the tribunal of the Supreme Judge. So much for the importance of *genealogies*, in a question respecting Levitical priesthood.

2. It remains to be proved that those genealogical registers contained precisely the items, which the apostle mentions.

1. The *father's* name was essential: for none but the son of a priest could, on any condition, be admitted to the priesthood. Exod. xxviii. 1. I Chron. xxiv.

2. The *mother's* name was equally essential: for the son of a priest by an improper mother was detruled from the priestly office, Lev. xxi. 13—15. "And he" (the high priest) "shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife. Neither shall he profane" (that is secularise, or reduce from the state of priestly consecration, to the rank of a common Israelite) "his seed among his people: for I the Lord do sanctify him," Ezek. xlv. 22. "Neither shall they" (the priests) "take for their wives a widow, or her that is put away: but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow that had a priest before."

From which it appears that if a Jewish priest should marry, not an Israelitish virgin, nor the widow of a priest, but the widow of a common Israelite, or a divorced woman, &c. the issue of such a marriage would be desecrated, or *profaned among the people*, and excluded from the service and privileges of the altar.

Of consequence the *genealogical register*, which *alone* could establish a man's right to the priesthood, must contain both his *father's* name, and his *mother's*, that it might appear, that the former was a priest, and the latter such a woman as could, according to law, be the mother of a priest.

3. The same register must contain the *time* of his birth "or his beginning of days," as Paul has it. For as the priests entered on the discharge of their office at thirty years of age, and ceased from officiating at fifty, the date of their birth was necessary to fix both the commencement and termination of their service, Numb. iv. 1—3.

4. It is not easy to assign any special cause for registering the *death* of priests, or, in Paul's words, their "end of life:" unless any one should suppose that it subserved regularity in filling vacancies. Yet there is no reason to doubt that such an entry found a place in the Levitical records. For, in addition to the common motives which incline all people to make the decease of friends a matter of record, it is worthy of remark, that in all the ancient genealogical registers, antediluvian, and postdiluvian, this item is con-

stantly found. The reader is referred to the antediluvian genealogy from Adam to Noah, Gen. v., and to the postdiluvian genealogy from Shem to Abraham, Gen. xi.* These ancient records no doubt furnished the race of Abraham with a copy for theirs, and though they might add to the items of the antique pattern, there is no reason to imagine that they detracted from them; for the motives to precision had grown upon their hands. And this, for the tenuity of the subject, may suffice.

It is hoped that what has been offered will have evinced that the language of Paul, in the passage under consideration, is nothing else than a verbal description of a Levitical genealogical register: in which every object is made to pass slowly before the eye, for the purpose of fixing an indelible impression on the mind, of a priesthood distinct from Aaron's, and the type of Messiah's. In this view every phrase has its definite and ample meaning: a meaning compatible with good

* In this genealogy the phrase, "and he died," is omitted. But its effect is produced, by stating the number of years each patriarch lived.

sense, corresponding with the facts of ancient history, and according with the scope of the apostle's argument: a meaning, moreover, illustrated and confirmed by other phrases of kindred and indisputable signification, in the discourse.

Melchisedec, says Paul, after whose similitude Jesus is constituted a priest by the oath of God, has nothing to do with your Levitical priesthood. His priesthood could not be established by your law: (*μετ' ἀναλογισμένους ἑαυτῶν*) he reckons not his genealogy from your priests. Search all the records of the tribe of Levi, Melchisedec (*ἀγενεαλογητός*) is without genealogy there. Search minutely: do you find his father's name? No: (*ἄπατρός*) he is without father. Can you find his mother's name? No: (*ἄμητος*) he is without mother. Have you fallen upon the record of his birth? No, nor of his death: (*μετὰ ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν, μετὰ ζωῆς τελευτῆς*) he has neither beginning of days nor end of life recorded here. Very well, exclaims Paul, here you have a Priest of the Most High God, who has nothing to do with your Levitical priesthood: a priest, after whose similitude God has sworn to constitute the priesthood of his son. The negation of Au-

ronic priesthood, therefore, is no prejudice to the priesthood of Jesus: Nay, but it is a confirmation of that priesthood. For you to expect that God should constitute Messiah a priest after the order of Aaron, is to expect that he should violate his oath; and to deny that Messiah *is* a priest, is to maintain that God *has* violated his oath.

We have now weathered the *Cape of Storms*, or rather let us call it the *Cape of Good Hope*, for henceforth our voyage will be safe, and perhaps we may return enriched with some of the treasures of the east. A single error in any first principle of an argument propagates and reproduces itself through the whole train of conclusions; and these new errors, leading still to further errors, will be in number and magnitude directly proportioned to the logical accuracy of the understanding employed in the discussion. On the other hand, the detection of the prime error leads to an easy refutation of all its consequences. That task in relation to the present discourse is now accomplished. But to proceed.

IV. Of the duration of Melchisedec's priesthood.

The following passages relate to this subject.

Chap. vii.

3 αφωμοιωμενος δε τω υιω τῆ Φεε μενει ιερευς εις το διηνεκες.

8 και ὧδε μιν δεκατας αποδνησκοντες ανθρωποι λαμβανουσιν· εκει δε, μαρτυρευμενος ὅτι ζῇ.

15 και περισσοτερον εἰ κατ' ὅμιλον εἰν, εἰ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιοτητα Μελχισεδεκ ανισαται ιερευς ἑτερος,

16 ὅς κ' κατὰ νομον εντολης σαρκικης γεγονεν αλλα κατὰ δυναμιν ζωης ακαταλυτα.

17 Μαρτυρει γαρ, ὅτι συ ιερευς εις τον αιωα κατὰ τὴν ταξιν Μελχισεδεκ.

3. "But made like unto the Son of God, *abideth a priest continually.*"

8. "And here men that die receive tithes; but there *he receiveth them* of whom it is witnessed *that he liveth.*"

15. "And it is yet far more evident, for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest."

16. "Who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the *power of an endless life.*"

17. "For he testifieth thou art a priest *forever* after the order of Melchisedec."

23 και οἱ μὲν πλείονες
εἰσι γεγονότες ἱερεῖς, δια-
το θανάτῳ κωλυεσθαι
παραμενεῖν.

24 ὁ δὲ δια το μνεῖν
αὐτον εἰς τον αἰωνα,
απαρβατον εχει τμν
ιερωσυνην :

23. "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death."

24. "But this man because he continueth ever hath an *unchangeable* priesthood."

When the meaning of one word is fixed, the passages cited above will be perfectly perspicuous. In the cx. psalm God is represented as declaring with an oath that his Son should be a priest, עוֹלָם, which Paul translates εἰς τον αἰωνα, or as it is in our common version "Forever." But it is well known, that neither the Hebrew, nor the Greek term, uniformly signify duration strictly eternal; but frequently defined portions of duration. Two or three appropriate quotations will place the meaning of these words in the clearest light, according to their application in the cx. psalm, and in the passages cited from the vii. chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Exod. xii. 17. "And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread: for in this self-same

day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall you observe this day in your generations by חקת ימים, νομιμον αἰωνιον,*—an ordinance *forever*." That is by an ordinance continuing during the *dispensation* established by the Horeb covenant.

Exod. xl. 15. "And thou shalt anoint them," (the sons of Aaron) "as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office, for their anointing shall surely be—לכהנת עולם; χρισμα—ιερατειας εως τον αιωνα*—an *everlasting priesthood* throughout their generations." That is, a priesthood throughout that *dispensation*.

I. Chron. xxiii. 13. "And Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons—עדת עולם—εως αιωνος*—*forever*, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless his name—עדת עולם—εως αιωνος*—*forever*."

Now comparing these citations with the cx. psalm, and the vii. chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, we collect that Melchisedec's, Aaron's and Messiah's[•] priesthoods were לעולם

• Septuagint.

—*εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*—*everlasting priesthoods*: that is, priesthoods continuing throughout their *dispensations* respectively; though these dispensations were of very unequal duration. Of the truth of this representation there can be no doubt whatever: indeed it is impossible that it should be false, because it resolves itself into two matters of fact. The *first fact*, is that Melchisedec, Aaron, and Messiah, had each a priesthood *לעולם*, *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, for ever: of this the language of the divine Spirit is the evidence. The *second fact*, is that these priesthoods were of very unequal length: Melchisedec's lasting only during his *own* life; Aaron's lasting during the Horeb covenant, say from his consecration at Mount Sinai till the burning of the temple at Jerusalem by Vespasian; but Christ's lasting from his incarnation to eternity. Now whenever terms expressive of *duration*, are applied to the offices or official functions of these priests, such terms must be understood relatively to their respective dispensations. With this idea in view, let us proceed to compare the synonymous expressions on this subject.

1.

x. 1. The Jewish priests offered up sacrifices year by year *continually*. } εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.

vii. 3. Melchisedec abideth a priest *continually*. } εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.

That is the priesthood and ministration of Melchisedec continued throughout *his* dispensation, and the priesthood and ministrations of the Levitical priests continued throughout *their* dispensation. But who would infer that their dispensations are of *equal duration*.

2.

vii. 16. Jesus was not made a priest "*after the law of a carnal commandment*:" —viz., the law of the Jewish priesthood. } ἔκκατὰ νόμος σαρκικῆς ἐντολῆς γεγενῆς.

vii. 23. The Jewish priests were *many*, "because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death." } διὰ τὸ θανάτῳ κωλυεσθαι παραμένειν.

vii. 8. Among the Levites }
 “men that die,” received } *αποθνήσκοντες ἄνθρωποι.*
 tythes.

The law of the Jewish priesthood was similar to, and founded upon, the law of man's *animal nature*; or, in the apostle's language, it was “the law of a carnal commandment.” For as, by the law of man's animal nature, one generation dies, and is succeeded by another; so, by the law of the Levitical priesthood, the death of a priest made room for a successor. Hence under that law no priest was permitted to continue throughout the whole dispensation, “by reason of death:” being mortal men they died, and transmitted their priesthood to successors. But Jesus was not made a priest after the similitude of that law; for then, officiating only during a part of his dispensation, he must have surrendered up his priesthood into the hands of a successor.

3.

vii. 3. Melchisedec “abid- }
 eth a priest continually. } *μένει ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.*

vii. 8. It is testified of him }
 “that he liveth.” } μαρτυρημενος ὅτι ζῇ.

vii. 17. After his similitude Jesus is made a priest }
 “for ever.” } εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

vii. 16. And therefore he }
 is a priest “according to }
 the power of an endless life.” } κατὰ δυνάμιν ζωῆς ἀκατάλυτης.

vii. 24. “But this priest }
 (Jesus) because he continueth ever hath an unchangeable priesthood.” } ὁ δὲ διὰ το μένειν αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἀπαράβατον ἔχει τὴν ἱεροσύνην.

In the foregoing class of quotations, Paul was seen demonstrating the contrast between the priesthoods of Jesus and of Aaron. In the class now under review, we behold him drawing the parallel between Jesus's priesthood and Melchisedec's. And the similitude, in the latter instance, is as marked and striking, as the contrast is in the former. Melchisedec was a priest (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) through a whole dispensation: according to the power (ζωῆς ἀκατάλυτης) of an endless life, that is, a life not

ending during the dispensation. It is therefore testified truly of him (ὅτι ζῇ) that he liveth to the end of his dispensation: and abideth a priest (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) continually throughout that dispensation. After the order, pattern, or similitude, was Jesus constituted a priest. And because he is a priest (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) for a whole dispensation, he hath (ἀπαρβατον τὴν ἱεροσυνήν) an unchangeable, or *intransmissible* priesthood, one which will never descend to a successor.

It is hoped that the subject has been placed in a clear and satisfactory view. A solicitude, which may perhaps be smiled on as finical, has been shown to place the phrases of kindred sense side by side, that they might interchangeably irradiate each other. And the *one, simple*, meaning which they convey is the proof of the justness of our interpretation. The phrases which have suffered much by criticism are those, which respect Melchisedec. The phrases (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) “for ever”—(μενει ἰησους εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) “abideth a priest continually”—(μαρτυρουμενος ὅτι ζῇ) “of whom it is witnessed that he liveth—(κατὰ δυνάμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτης, *as it respects Melchisedec*) “according to the power of an endless life.” These phrases have all

suffered distortion from one hand or another. Their true signification has been given above. But if any one should yet doubt, let him try to give them any other sense whatever, which will not terminate in a *direct* falsehood.

Was Melchisedec a *living man* when Paul wrote his epistle to the Hebrews? No. And I hope no man will display the folly of calling for the evidence. Paul therefore could not mean by the phrases "according to the power of an endless life," and "of whom it is witnessed that he liveth," to assert that Melchisedec was a *living man* when he wrote, unless he meant to assert what was not true.

Does he yet *live* and *officiate* as a *priest*? If so, it must be in heaven: but it required better blood than ever Melchisedec shed, or than ever ran in his veins, to enter into the *Holy place* in heaven, "there to appear in the presence of God for us." By the phrases, therefore, of being a "priest for ever" and of "abiding a priest continually," Paul could not have intended to assert so gross a falsehood, and one so contrary to the argument of his epistle, and so injurious to the honour of his Lord, as that Melchisedec was officiating in the priest's office, at the throne of grace in the heavens.

Will it be said the scriptures are *silent* as to this man's death; and that, that is the *same thing* as to assert that he liveth? Strange! Not to *make mention* of a man's death is the same thing as to *witness* that he liveth! But then remark the consequence; for if the man be *really dead*, the witness is *false*.

The simple fact is, the man was *dead*, and his priesthood had *expired* with him: but as he lived a priest throughout a whole dispensation of grace, he was a type of Messiah, who is the sole priest in his dispensation: whereas the Jewish priests dying and transmitting their office to successors, were not such types of Messiah, who hath "an intransmissible priesthood," as was Melchisedec.

V. Of the dignity of Melchisedec's priesthood.

VII. 4. "Now consider how *great* this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth part of the spoils." 5. "And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tythes of the people according to the law, that is of their breth-

ren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham." 6. "But he, whose descent is not counted from them, received tythes from Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises." 7. "And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." 8. "And here men that die receive tythes, but there he received them of whom it is witnessed that he liveth." 9. And, as I may so say, Levi also who receiveth tythes, payed tythes in Abraham." 10. For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him."

But who could be greater than Abraham, the friend of God, so celebrated for his faith, the father of the faithful, the root of God's church, and progenitor of Messiah? It was perhaps a desire of finding a man, whom they need not blush to own as superior to their father Abraham, that made the Jews pitch on Shem, for the Melchisedec of Moses and David. They were certainly too much elated with ideas of the dignity of the Abrahamic race, and of the civil and religious institutions bestowed on it. Gratitude to God, should have been combined with humility. But pride destroyed humility, and dethroned gratitude: the singularity, more than the value of their

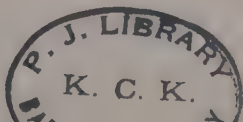
religious institutions, gratified: of the latter they had formed a very erroneous estimate; but this much they knew, that their religion distinguished them from all other nations. It also happened to them, as to all mankind, that the external apparatus and forms of their religion, as more visible to the carnal eye, and observable with greater ease and less sacrifice of passion, concentrated their zeal, more than the spiritual essence of its principles. Hence they could tolerate a degradation of their Messiah, sooner than a sentiment which seemed to breathe disrespect to the external pomp and splendour of their typical system. The priesthood of Jesus, because it implied a deficiency, and want of merit, in the Levitical priesthood, was publicly disgusting. On this account Abraham, and Levi, must be let down to their proper level; that Messiah may ascend to his supereminent dignity. Melchisedec was superior to them both.

There is no evidence that this man was either a more pious man, or a mightier prince than Abraham. But he was *priest of the most high God*; and in this official character was Abraham's superior. This is all the superiority Paul meant to ascribe to him, as

appears from his confining himself to the priestly actions of *receiving tythes*, and blessing *Abraham*: "and without all controversy the less is blessed of the better," and the *inferior* pays tythes to the *superior*. But this was the severest stab he could give to the imaginary importance of the Levitical priesthood. Had Melchisedec reigned over half the globe, or had he excelled Moses in revelations and miracles, his superiority in these respects would have been nothing to the purpose: a Jew might admit the whole, and after all stickle for the supremacy of his priesthood. But when Melchisedec, in the character of a *priest*, is exhibited as superior to Abraham even after he had received the covenant charter of his race's dignity; the Jewish priesthood sinks, not only beneath that of Messiah, but beneath that of Melchisedec: so far from bearing a competition with the *real* priesthood, it is not even the first of types.

We may conceive the apostle conveying the amount of his argument to his countrymen, in terms such as these: While, from an overweening valuation of your priesthood, you are ready to reject the priesthood of Jesus, do you imagine that yours is the *only*, or

even the *noblest* priesthood, that ever existed among men. Look back to the origin of your nation, and there you will find your father Abraham, after he had received the *covenant*, which is the source and sum of all your national glory, *paying tythes* to Melchisedec, a priest of the Most High God, and receiving *his blessing*. And as he was at that time your covenant head and *representative*, *his* act was *yours*, and his inferiority your inferiority. And therefore to speak plainly (ὥς ἐπὶ οὗς εἰπεῖν) your whole nation, and among the rest the tribe of Levi, who boast their priesthood, paid tythes in Abraham to Melchisedec, *his* superior, and *theirs*: and bowed farther to that superior man, by receiving his *blessing*; for “without all controversy the less is blessed of the better.” After the model of that man’s noble priesthood, God hath sworn to raise up the priesthood of his son: and be not chagrined, my brethren, that your covenant God, who hath always consulted for your nation, better than ever it consulted for itself, hath raised up the priesthood of Jesus, not according to the less worthy order of Aaron, but according to the more worthy order of Melchisedec.



There is one passage more relating to the superiority of Jesus's priesthood over that of Aaron, which, because it is too plain to need illustration, we shall merely cite—

vii. 20—"And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made a priest;" 21. ("For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath, by him that said unto him, the Lord sware and will not repent, thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.") 22. "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

But waiving farther discussion, we shall close by a statement of the *typical* points in Melchisedec's character, and by placing opposite to them the analogous particulars in the character of Jesus, the high priest of our profession. A simple statement is all that shall be given here, the illustration has been seen in the antecedent parts of the discourse.

VI. Comparison between Melchisedec and Jesus Christ.

MELCHISEDEC.	JESUS CHRIST.
1. Was a <i>King-priest</i> .	1. Is a <i>King-priest</i> .

2. Was a *Righteous* king-priest.

3. Was a King-priest in Salem, a city, the name of which signifies *Peace*.

4. Was not a Levitical priest:—had no genealogy in the tribe of Levi; his father's name, his mother's name,—the time of his birth, the time of his death; are not entered in the Levitical records.

5. Was a priest for a whole dispensation; and lived, and ministered, from the beginning of that dispensation to the end of it.

6. Was greater than Abraham after he had received the covenant

2. Is a *Righteous* king-priest.

3. Is a King-priest in the church of God, which is a *peaceful* community. Rom. xiv. 17.

4. Is not a Levitical priest: "for it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."

5. Is a priest for a whole dispensation; And, because he continueth from the beginning to the end of it, hath an *intransmissible* priesthood.

6. Is greater than Abraham and his race, greater than the Levi-

and promises, and of consequence was greater than all the posterity of Abraham: received tythes from Abraham and blessed him, and of consequence received tythes from all his posterity, and from Levi among the rest; and blessed them.	tical priests, on many accounts; among the rest, for this, that he was made a priest after the more honourable order of Melchisedec, and constituted by the oath of God; receives the tythes of his churches adoration, and blesses the whole family of faith.
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THIS then is the interpretation of the passages of scripture respecting Melchisedec, which is now submitted to the reader's candid consideration, in hope of a favourable reception, provided the main argument shall be found perspicuous and conclusive. Whatever may be its demerits in other respects, one merit it has: it is simple, and as remote from all *refinement* and *mysticism*, as can well be imagined. All other interpretations, which

we have seen, are mystic, involved, inconsistent, and inconceivable. This interpretation carries us consistently through every step of the apostle's argumentation, and gives clearness and precision to every syllable of the scriptural phraseology. All others destroy the argument, and render the phraseology foolish. But the reader will judge.

It is impossible, however, to conclude, without animadverting on the extreme anxiety, which the apostle displays on this theme of our Lord's priesthood. He calls into operation all those mighty powers of mind with which God had armed him, and all the knowledge of Jewish and Christian theology, which he possessed, to defend this doctrine against all the forms of opposition. The man who marks his movements sees that the motto on his banner is DEATH OR VICTORY. It is not every cause that could claim so much. But truly the apostle did not manage a local or transient litigation: it was the subject of human redemption that he pleaded: the benign-

nity of deity, the salvation of man, and the glory of Jesus, were at stake. Even the passages of scripture, which have been brought forward in this dissertation, will have evinced that the priestly atonement of Messiah was, in all ages, and under every dispensation of grace instituted for sinful men, the very same thing, which it was in Paul's day, and is at this hour, the basis of a saint's faith—the concentrated essence of religion. Look from Abel to Melchisedec, and from Melchisedec to Aaron, and you scarcely find one single instance of a worshipper of the true God, but it is at the altar, and shedding the blood of atonement. But when you have arrived at that prodigious combination of civil and religious polity, which God formed at Sinai for his beloved nation, there you find the animal creation with their veins sluiced, and the fire burning night and day on God's altar, sending up to heaven the incessant volume of sacrificial smoke, a sweet smelling savour to the Lord: while a whole family, increasing with the population of the community, serve

at that altar; and one tribe out of twelve are consecrated to the various services of the priesthood.

And why all this! Strip sacrifice of typical reference, make it an ultimate duty of religion, and then let the wit of man say one rational thing in its favour. Is it that the Father of Mercies delights in the agonies and groans of his expiring creatures, and feasts only on blood! Was it out of lenity that he levied so burdensome a tax on his beloved people, and then burnt it to ashes! Where was the policy worthy of Moses, to mention no higher name, in subtracting from the national wealth and industry the labour of so many hands! And why, of all things, should the whole nation be called from their homes and occupations, three times in the year, to behold their flocks and herds reduced to smoke and ashes! But make the ordinance emblematical, let these priests and their bleeding victims, represent Jehovah's high priest, expiating the sins of his people by his blood, and

obtaining access for them into the presence of the Father of Mercies, and all becomes glorious; worthy of God, and consolatory to men. Jehovah, offended at sin, is exhibited as appeased by the sacrifice of his Son: and sinners, placing faith in the blood and intercession of their high priest, "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

But leaving the law, the gospel system is to be looked to as the consummation of religion in every respect: and whatever darkness may have prevailed in the antecedent dispensations, we are entitled to expect that a dispensation introduced by the personal ministry of the Son of God, and completed by his apostles under a full unction of the Holy Ghost, will dispel it all, and leave the doctrine of human salvation as luminous as it ought to be, or indeed can be. And if redemption by the blood of atonement be *indeed* the doctrine of salvation, it will not be thrown behind a veil,

nor sketched in the back ground of the painting, diminished and obscure; but will stand forth the prominent figure, to strike every eye, and enrapture every heart. This is exactly what has taken place. When John the Baptist pointed out the Messiah to his disciples, it was thus, "Behold *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*" When our Lord spoke of redeeming his people, his *life* was the price which he proposed to pay for them. And it is apparent to the most transient reader of the apostolic writings, that redemption by the blood of Jesus was the burden of their preaching. And be it noted, that this doctrine was far from being *popular* in that age: it was then as obnoxious to the scoffs and scorn of various classes of men, as ever it has been since: and nothing but its truth, and fundamental importance, can acquit the apostles from the charge of folly in burdening their moral system with so repulsive a doctrine. To the Jews it was a *stumbling-block*, to the Greeks it was *foolishness*; yet these men determined to know nothing among

either of them save "Christ crucified." And to say no more, the priesthood of Jesus, and its sole efficacy in bringing salvation to sinful men, is the theme of this epistle, a theme professedly stated for accurate discussion. And surely there is not, in all the book of God, another subject more copiously or solemnly argued. The consecration of Jesus to the priesthood, the sacrifice which he offered, his intercession founded on that sacrifice; the efficacy of that sacrifice in purging sin, in purifying the conscience, in obtaining reconciliation, in destroying him that hath the power of death, in conducting many sons to glory; and the dreadful consequences of treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing—In what terms are they not portrayed!

And indeed if Christ's atonement, with its associated doctrine, the application of his blood to the conscience by the Holy Spirit, be denied; all the religion that ever God re-

vealed to sinful men is swept clean away. All the sacrificial blood shed by the Patriarchs is nothing: the Jewish priests with their torrents of sacrificial blood are nothing: the doctrine of salvation by the blood of Jesus, taught by himself, and by all his apostles, is nothing: and this epistle certainly worse than nothing: because, after a prodigious parade of zeal and argument, it proves just nothing at all. The river which watereth the Paradise of the church is dried up in all its streams: the flowers wither, and the trees shed their immature fruit. Say not we have still left us the doctrine of the resurrection! It is not an escape from the grave, but admission into the presence of a reconciled God, that we want. Say not, that even after the doctrine of atonement is set aside, we have excellent rules of morality! What avails it, with regard to our eternal condition, since by the deeds of the law no flesh living shall be justified in the sight of God. And even in regard to the present life, what injury must our morality suffer, by being cut off

from approaching the throne of grace, "that we may obtain mercy, and grace to help in the time of need!" After we shall have renounced the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Jesus, is there no danger that our morality will degenerate into the fretting metaphysics of moral speculation; questions about *utility*, and *sympathy*, and *selfishness*, and *benevolence*, and all that endless subtilty? But even admitting that practical morality should, as in many instances it certainly does, exist without faith in the Redeemer's blood; it will merit inquiry how much of that morality is the legacy of parents, whose consciences were purged by that precious blood; how much of it is the mere habit of the age; how much of it, the prudence of the man, who, from one cause or another, finds it a point of worldly prudence to maintain a virtuous carriage. It may not be useless to trace this morality in another direction; and to ask how much of it springs from the love and fear of God, by what hopes it is cheered, by what motives it is prompted: for even

they who possess it can hardly say with the apostle "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all then were all dead: and that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."* But inquiries of the sort alluded to each man must make for himself. It is not for us to usurp the province of judging the motives of any man's virtuous conduct. Besides, indeed, we have better evidence of the connection between the doctrine of atonement and practical righteousness, than could result from the analysis of apparent virtues, were that analysis much more practicable, than, happily for mankind, it is found to be: broad evidence, collected from the whole surface of the moral world. In what nation did practical virtue ever distinguish the general character, till the doctrine of Jesus's atonement went before and sowed the seeds? From what country has this doctrine taken its flight, without carrying with

* 2 Cor. 14, 15.

it the purity and dignity of Christian morals; while immediately on its departure, the abominations of heathen depravity have sprung up like indigenous briars and thorns, weeds and poisons; presenting to the eye the horrible prospect of a land from which God has withdrawn his blessing, and left the original curse to its uncontrolled operation? Cast your eyes over Christendom, and point with your finger to any church you please. I ask what was the golden age of that church? Was it not the age when the atonement of Jesus stood prominent in her creed, was proclaimed from her pulpits, was lisped by her babes, and dropped like honey from the lips of all her members? What was her silver age? Was it not that in which this doctrine, not yet forgotten, fell into disuse and neglect; and preachers instead of endeavouring to raise the practical virtues from faith in the Saviour's blood, like clusters from the vine; began to demoralise the age by the abstractions and prettinesses of moral declamation? Pursuing the allusion, you have the brazen age, when

doubt and denial of this doctrine became fashionable and common. And its general rejection gives the age of *iron*.

Protinus irrupit venæ pejoris in œvum,
Omne nefas : fugere pudor, verumque fidesque :
In quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolique,
Insidiæque, et vis, et amor sceleratus habendi.

—————Hard steel succeeded then ;
And stubborn as the metal were the men.
Truth, modesty, and shame, the world forsook ;
Fraud, avarice, and force their places took.

Would you reform that age, bring back the atonement. You never can have a Wickliffe, a Luther, a Calvin, or a Knox, without it. One thing in respect to this doctrine is really strange, that while we are told by the wise men of this world, that it is mystical, and absurd, and even that it is not found in the scriptures, rude and untutored minds, without reading any other books than the scriptures, have drunk it in, in all ages and countries : and with it, have also drunk in the principles of the most ardent piety, pure morality, and mental cultivation.

If the present dissertation shall be found to have cast a ray of light on those passages of scripture, which have passed under consideration; it is hoped that by disentangling them from unjust criticisms, and injurious imputations, it may be of some service to the general theme of our Lord's priesthood.

THE END.

A SKETCH
OF THE
LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST,
FROM
HIS BIRTH TILL THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS
PUBLIC MINISTRY.

THE particular year, and the particular time of the year, in which our Lord was born, have not been ascertained with infallible certainty. The number of Christians was for a long time inconsiderable, in comparison with the heathens among whom they resided; they would therefore of necessity conform in all their civil transactions to the modes of computing time used in their respective countries. Satisfied with the general fact of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they do not seem to have placed any particular value on the chronology of these events, nor to have felt the ambition of originating a new era.

It was not till the beginning of the sixth century that the vulgar christian era was introduced, by Dionysius Exiguus, a learned monk and abbot at Rome; since that period, our pre-

sent mode of computing time has diffused itself over all those countries which have embraced the christian faith. Any mistakes which may have been adopted at the establishment of this epoch, are now incurable ; nor is the evil of sufficient magnitude to justify the inconveniences of innovation. It may be mentioned, however, that the best chronologers are agreed that our Lord was born in the fourth year antecedent to the vulgar era ; and the particular period of that year has been fixed for the month of September, or the time of the autumnal equinox.

When we examine the scriptures of the Old Testament, we find that the particular characteristic of the ancient religion was the hope of a Messiah, or an anointed Saviour, who should in due time be sent into the world by God, to shed back efficacy upon the religious institutions of the antecedent times, and to establish an uniform and immutable religion for the whole human family. The prophets, whose writings compose the Jewish code of religion, are remarkable for the precision with which they define the person, character and conduct of Messiah, that, when he should appear, mankind might not be embarrassed with any doubts respecting his identity. His character will be more fully developed, when we shall have traced

him through the whole of his earthly career; but, previously to treating of his birth, it may be necessary to mention the three following characteristics of him, as they are very explicitly and emphatically detailed by the prophets; namely, that he should be the son of woman, a descendant of Abraham, and of the family of king David. The evangelists, though succinct in their narrative, have, either intentionally or by divine superintendence, marked with precision those particulars in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, which demonstrate his Messiahship.

Mary, the mother of our Lord, descended from the family of David, by a line which had fallen into decay and poverty, was betrothed to Joseph, who traced his pedigree to the same royal ancestor. When the fulness of time, established by the divine purpose for the appearance of Messiah upon earth, had arrived; God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city of Galilee, where Mary dwelt, to announce to her that she was the happy woman whom God had destined to be the mother of the Saviour of the world. And when Mary suggested her state of celibacy as incompatible with the fulfilment of the promise, the angel informed her that her son was not to be an ordinary man, born according to the law of human descent; but that he should

be the immediate creation of the Holy Ghost, born of her as his proper mother, but without a human father ; that he should be the son of the Most High God ; that his name should be called Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins ; that the Lord God would give him the throne of his father David, that he should rule over Jacob for ever, and that of his kingdom there should be no end. Farther to encourage her faith, he informed her that her cousin Elizabeth had already been six months pregnant ; this child of Elizabeth proved to be the famous forerunner of our Lord, John the Baptist.

Shortly after the departure of the angel, Mary arose and went on a visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Zacharias, the husband of Elizabeth, was a descendant of Aaron, and a priest of the order of Abia, one of the twenty-four orders into which David had divided the Jewish priesthood ; they were both distinguished for piety, and have this character given them, that they were righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. It will be necessary to take up the history of this family six months before the visit of Mary. We are informed that they were of advanced age and without children ; but that on a certain occasion, when Zacharias, who was then on his

routine of duty at the temple, went in to burn incense before the Lord, leaving the congregation without engaged in prayer, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense, who addressed him in the following manner: "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John; and thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, and even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Startled at this extraordinary message, and looking more to the laws of nature than to the power of God, Zacharias displays a culpable incredulity, and demands a sign of the angel in confirmation of the promise. He receives a sign, and one which admirably displays the mixture of severity and mercy which God measures to human frailty; a severe punishment is inflicted upon

him, and yet the gracious promise is not defeated, but confirmed by the infliction. "And the angel answering, said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."*

The meeting between Mary and her kinswoman was in the warmth and rapture of more than mortal friendship. They mutually knew the destination of heaven; that the one should be the mother of Messiah, and the other the mother of his forerunner; the Spirit of God descended upon them, and they spoke in strains of praise to Almighty goodness, which nothing inferior to inspiration is capable of uttering. It would appear that Mary abode with Elizabeth till the birth of her son, who was circumcised on the eighth day, and named John. Zacharias recovered the use of his speech on the occasion, and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, praised God, and spoke in raptures of the approaching redemption of the world, and of the agency

* Luke i. 19, 20.

which his son should have in preparing the way for the great deliverer.

After her visit of three months to Elizabeth, Mary returned home to her own residence in Nazareth. Her appearance soon alarmed Joseph in regard to her purity and his own honour; but, being a good man, he felt reluctant to expose her to the disgrace and civil punishments which the Mosaic law had attached to an adulteress: he therefore was meditating in his mind to dissolve his marriage contract privately, by which means he might shield her from indelible ignominy and punishment, though nothing could screen her from the shame of a daughter who had wrought folly in Israel. During this time of painful suspense to both parties, in which Joseph could not ask any explanation of his betrothed wife, because her guilt was to his eye apparent; and in which Mary could not offer an explanation, because the truth would appear incredible, God interposed in mercy to both. An angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins. Then Joseph being raised from

sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife." Thus was Joseph divinely assured of the fidelity of his wife; and the character of Mary and her son defended against human reproach, till the actions of Messiah should place them both beyond the reach of human animadversion.

About this time, Augustus Cæsar had issued an edict for a general enrolment of the inhabitants of the land: and Joseph with his wife Mary went from Nazareth, the place of their residence, to Bethlehem in Judea, the city of David, to be enrolled in their proper tribe and family. The caravanseraï, or public inn where they put up, was at the time crowded, owing to the concourse of people which the enrolment had drawn together; and as there was no room for them in the house appropriated for lodging, they were obliged to put up with such accommodations as the place appointed for the reception of the beasts of burden furnished them. In this humble and obscure situation it was that Mary brought forth her son, the first-born, and the Saviour of the world; and, having wrapped him in swaddling clothes, laid him in a manger. There is something in the humiliations of virtuous poverty, which excites powerful sympathies; especially when the objects have previ-

ously been, or afterwards have become, the generous and disinterested benefactors of mankind. The writings of past ages show the feelings of mankind, when they considered the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, as a helpless babe, wrapped in a cloth and laid in a manger; his mother with more than a mother's yearnings bending over him; and his reputed father, with feelings which no human father ever felt, looking on. It would be easy to give scope to sensibility on this subject; but is not the subject beyond the scope of all human feeling?

However lowly the birth of Messiah may appear, in the estimation of those for whom the pomps and vanities of the world have attractions, God prepared a magnificence of display on the occasion, worthy of the appearance of his only begotten Son upon earth. There was, near Bethlehem, a company of shepherds in the open fields, tending their flocks during the night; and an angel of the Lord appeared to them, diffusing around him the glories of the celestial light. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said unto them, Be not afraid, for lo! I bring unto you glad tidings of great joy which will be to all people: that unto you there is born in the city of David, a Saviour, who is

Christ the Lord. And this shall be a proof of the fact; you will find the babe swathed and lying in a manger. No sooner was this annunciation made, than behold a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest heavens; and on earth peace, and good-will among men. This we know, and are sure, is the gospel of Jesus Christ, peace between God our creator and his rebellious offspring, and good-will and harmony among our race. But oh! how lamentable the thought, that this divine religion has been made the occasion of alienation from God, and of strife and bloodshed among mankind.

As soon as the angels had withdrawn, the shepherds agreed to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, in order to ascertain the fact; and there they found Joseph, Mary and the newborn babe, the Saviour of the world; and having obtained complete satisfaction, they departed, and published abroad the whole matter. Eight days after the birth of the Saviour, he was, according to the law given to his ancestor Abraham, circumcised, and named Jesus; that is, the Saviour, according to the name which the angel had given him before he was conceived. It may be remarked here, that while the Saviour of the world was an unconscious babe, incapa-

ble of any voluntary act, his parents submitted him to circumcision, and kept him in all the ordinances of God.

As Jesus was a first-born son, it was necessary that he should be presented unto the Lord in the temple, and redeemed by sacrifice: six weeks, therefore, after his birth, as prescribed in the law of Moses, his parents took him up to the temple, for the performance of this ceremony, and others prescribed in the law. Every day brought forth new scenes of wonder in the life of this extraordinary child. There lived at that time in Jerusalem an aged man of distinguished piety and devotion, called Simeon, to whom it had been revealed by the Holy Ghost "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." By the monition of the same Spirit, Simeon came into the temple at the very time the parents of Jesus were presenting him to the Lord; and, taking the babe in his arms, he burst out into this sublime exclamation: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." This venerable patriarch also blessed the parents of our Lord, and said

unto Mary his mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Whilst Joseph and Mary were absorbed in wonder at these new attestations to the dignity of the child, an aged saint and prophetess, named Anna, who, notwithstanding that she had reached the great longevity of eighty-four years, "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day," came forward at the instant when Simeon had ceased speaking, and joined her testimony to his, pointing out Jesus to all who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem. After Joseph and Mary had accomplished all things required by the divine law, and been favoured with a great enlargement of light and consolation, they returned with the babe to their own city of Nazareth in Galilee.

The next circumstance which occurs in the history of our Lord is the arrival of the eastern Magi at Jerusalem to do him homage. Among the Persians there was a class of learned men, named Magi, who devoted themselves to the study of theology, politics, astronomy, and philosophy in general; and were considered as the

interpreters of all laws, human and divine. As to the general purposes of their institution, they resembled the priests of Egypt, the gymnosophists of India, the Druids of the Celtic tribes, and the Levites among the Jews. These were respectively the learned men of these particular nations, the fountains and reservoirs of the public wisdom, the instructors and counsellors of their countrymen, and the proper candidates for all offices and employments requiring superior information and wisdom. The religion of the Persian Magi is said to have fallen into great decay and corruption, till it was reformed by the celebrated Zoroaster, or Zerdusht; who is supposed to have been a Jew, both by birth and profession, and a servant to one of the prophets, probably Ezekiel or Daniel. It is acknowledged that the corrupt eastern doctrine respecting two independent eternal principles, the one good and the other evil, was rejected by Zoroaster; that he taught that the Eternal Being is good, and the author only of that which is good; that the evil principle will finally be overpowered, and that good only will prevail; that at the end of the world there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a day of judgment; after which the angel of darkness, with his disciples, shall be sent into a world of

their own; where they shall suffer in everlasting darkness the punishment of their evil deeds; and the angel of light and his disciples shall go into a world of their own, where they shall receive in everlasting light the reward of their good deeds. The reformation effected by Zo-roaster seems to have been founded on true scriptural principles, and to display a minute acquaintance with the sacred writings of the Jews. It is therefore not at all astonishing that the Persian Magi, who probably had copies of the Jewish Scriptures, as well as intercourse with the dispersed Israelites, should cherish, in common with all the surrounding nations, the hope of a mighty deliverer arising among the Jews.

Some writers, however, suppose that the Magians who brought presents to our Lord were Arabians. In favour of this opinion, they allege that those parts of the Arabian peninsula which Ptolemy has named Arabia Felix and Arabia Deserta, were anciently called Kedem, or the east, as the remaining part of it was called Arabah, or the west. They allege, farther, that the gifts presented to our Lord were the natural productions of eastern Arabia. And they account for the expectation entertained by these Arabian Magi concerning the appearance of an

extraordinary prince in Israel, by the fact that Abraham's son Ishmael, and his sons by Keturah, had contributed largely to the population of Kedem, or eastern Arabia ; and that as these all carried with them the religion of Abraham, they must have carefully preserved the family hope, that a son of Abraham, in the line of Isaac, should one day appear as the Saviour of the world, and the blessing of all countries. It is, however, rather a subject of curiosity than of utility, to attempt ascertaining the exact situation of the country of those Magi who travelled to Jerusalem to pay homage to the infant Saviour ; the only circumstance that we can ascertain with any measure of certainty is, that their native residence lay at a great distance from Jerusalem.

We are informed that these Magi saw an extraordinary star in their own country, which they understood to portend the birth of a great King in Jerusalem, and that they concluded it to be their duty to go and pay him homage. The Scriptures have given us only the sketch of a few facts respecting these events, which we are to interpret and connect together in the due exercise of reason. It is apparent, then, that what is called a star, in this narrative, was not one of those luminous globes which appear

by night as if fixed in the azure heavens around us. It was a new and extraordinary light ; it does not seem to have appeared a second time to the Magi, till after they had reached Jerusalem ; on its second appearance, they were transported with joy ; and, conducting them on their way, it stood over the house where the infant Jesus was ; all which circumstances show it to have been not a natural, but a supernatural phenomenon. It seems to have been a supernatural brilliancy occasioned by an angel, like that which surrounded the angel who announced to the shepherds in the field the birth of Messiah ; and, in the first instance, it is not impossible that it was the very same heavenly light which appeared to both. We must suppose, also, that it required an angelic communication to inform the Magi that this light indicated the birth of Prince Messiah, as well as to satisfy the shepherds on the same point. And, in fine, we must conclude that, as the shepherds were directed to visit Bethlehem in order to behold the infant Saviour with their own eyes, a similar direction was given to the eastern Magi, with a similar intention.

What time the Magi took in making preparation for their journey, or how long they were in travelling to Jerusalem, we are not informed ;

but it appears that about a year must be allowed to have intervened between their first sight of the star, and their interview with Herod. It does not appear from the sacred history, that the extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Jesus, or those which occurred at his presentation in the temple, had reached the knowledge of Herod's court, or excited any interest or curiosity in that monarch. The facts, though very unusual in their nature, were rather of a religious than a political aspect, and were, therefore, entirely indifferent to men immersed in the pursuits and intrigues of ambition. But when the Magi with their splendid retinue and presents appeared, and inquired, perhaps at the court of Herod itself, for the new-born King of the Jews, whose star they declared they had seen in the east, and were come with costly presents to do him homage, the monarch was greatly agitated, and all Jerusalem with him. As the Jews were living in daily expectation of the appearance of their Messiah, and as the public opinion was that this Messiah should be a mighty prince, who would vindicate the liberties of his country, and subdue under the dominion of the Jews those who had formerly tyrannized over them, it was to be expected that the news of his birth would alarm Herod for the

stability of his throne, and excite in the bosoms of those who hated the tyrant, or who retained any sense of national independence and glory, the most tumultuous hopes and fears.

Herod acted on the occasion with his usual policy, decision, and disregard of moral principle. His first step was to call together the grand sanhedrim, consisting of the high priest, the chief-priests of the twenty-four orders, and other learned men, who composed the supreme tribunal in all questions connected with religion. When assembled, he proposes to them the question, where Messiah should be born. They inform him that the birth-place of Messiah was fixed in prophecy at the city of Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, and produce as the ground of their decision, the prophecy of Micah: "And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Herod next calls the Magi to a private audience, and, dissembling his murderous purpose, felicitates them and himself on the late happy event, and requests that they would search for the child, and, as soon as successful, bring him word, that he might go, and unite with them in paying homage to the prince of the kings of the earth.

The Magi, therefore, rejoicing in their hopeful prospects, departed from Jerusalem, and bent their course towards Bethlehem. But as Joseph and Mary had returned, immediately after the presentation of Jesus in the temple, to their usual residence at Nazareth in Galilee, it is apparent that a journey to Bethlehem would be useless, and a search for Messiah in that city unsuccessful. As soon as the Magi had departed from Jerusalem, the same friendly star which they had seen in their own country appeared to them again, to accomplish the work which it had before begun, and, guiding them on their way to Nazareth, it stood still over the house where the babe lay. It is not improbable that they encamped by day, their guide being withdrawn by God, lest some officious messenger should bear news to the king; and pursued their journey only by night, when the star appeared to lead their way. But our interesting narrative must not be interrupted by minute remarks.

Having entered the house, the Magi found the young child with Mary his mother, and, prostrating themselves before him, they did him obeisance; and opening their treasures, they presented him their gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Some imagine that they can discover a

mysterious meaning in the nature of the gifts which were presented ; but without entering into the discussion of questions of a dubious but not important character, it may be sufficient to mention that it has always been the custom, in the eastern countries, to make presents to any great man to whom a person is introduced ; that the presents of the Magi, gold, frankincense and myrrh, were the most costly articles of merchandise at that time known ; and we may conclude that the amount and value of the present was at once proportioned to the rank of the givers, and to the supereminent dignity of the personage who received them. It is probable, as we mentioned already in respect to the nocturnal appearance of the star, that the occurrences which have been narrated took place in the night ; and that the wise men having been introduced to the prince of kings, having done their obeisance and made their presents, retired to rest, purposing to return in the morning to Jerusalem to inform Herod of the success of their journey. Be this as it may, we are expressly told that they were warned by God in a dream, by no means to return to Herod ; and that they arose and pursued their journey directly to their own country, by another way than that by which they came.

Probably on the same night, an angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph in a dream, and commanded him to arise and take the young child and Mary his mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there till he should receive further orders, for Herod would surely seek the child's life. Accordingly he arose, and that very night set out for Egypt with Mary and her son. If it were proper to interrupt our narrative with moral reflections, they crowd upon us on this occasion. We shall, however, content ourselves with remarking the providence of God, which first brought his son into public notice, as the king of Israel, by the arrival of these illustrious strangers, and, by the presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh which they bestowed, furnished the holy family with the means of bearing the expense of their journey into Egypt, and their residence in that country.

Herod, whose object in desiring the wise men to bring him back word of the place where they should find the babe, was no other than that he might murder him, and thus rid himself and his successors from the fear of a competitor, had no sooner heard that they had hastily returned to their own country, treating him with contempt, than he was enraged at once with the indignity done him, and with increasing fear respecting,

the stability of his throne. Determined to stick at no atrocity which might afford him security, he instantly issued orders, and all the male children who had entered their second year and downwards, were put to death, in order that he who was born the king of the Jews might not escape. This barbarous massacre of the innocent babes was perfectly in accordance with the general character of Herod, in whom great talents were united with greater perfidy and cruelty. Before we dismiss this tyrant, it may not be amiss to give a slight sketch of his character, as an example of that class of monarchs whose talents are displayed only in deeds of mighty mischief, and who, to the disgrace of mankind, are complimented with the epithet Great. In early life he was governor of Galilee, under his father Antipater. In the civil wars between the Roman republic and Cæsar, Herod joined the party of Cassius, and was made governor of Cœlosyria. When Mark Anthony arrived victorious in Syria, Herod and his brother courted his favour, and were made tetrarchs in Judea. Being driven from Jerusalem by Antigonus, he went to Rome, where, beyond his expectation, he obtained the crown of Judea from the senate. After the battle of Actium, he visited Augustus at Rhodes, who replaced his diadem on his

head, and restored him to his sovereignty. It required great abilities to maintain his political rank in these stormy and tumultuous times ; but his conduct was marked with systematic duplicity, and the most heartless cruelty. In pursuit of his ambitious designs, he put to death the father, grandfather, uncle and brother of his beloved wife, Mariamne ; his two sons by her, and a son by a second wife, subsequently shared the same fate. When summoned to answer for some part of his conduct before Mark Anthony, the Roman triumvir, he gave orders to Joseph, whom he left as governor of Judea, that in case the trial should terminate fatally, he should put Mariamne, Herod's beloved wife, to death. Joseph discovered the plot to Mariamne, for which Herod put him to death ; but the high-spirited queen was irrecoverably alienated from her unnatural husband, whose morbid affection had doomed her to death, lest she should fall into the hands of another. In fine, Mariamne was brought to trial, convicted, and put to death. The murder of the innocents of Bethlehem filled up the measure of Herod's iniquity. A guilty conscience and perpetual conspiracies, preying on an exhausted constitution, threw the monarch into a mortal disease, which historians have represented as a special judgment of heaven for

the numerous enormities and impieties of which he had been guilty. His disorder was attended with the most loathsome circumstances that can be imagined. As death approached, his hatred of mankind grew furious. Numbers fell victims to appease the tortures of his mind. The last act of his life crowned the ferocious cruelty of his character. He had summoned the chief persons among the Jews to assemble at Jericho, and, when they arrived, had them shut up in the circus; and exacted an oath from his sister Salome and her husband that these should all be massacred, as soon as he should draw his last breath. For this, said he, will provide mourners for my funeral all over the land, and make the Jews in every family lament my death, who would otherwise exhibit no signs of concern. This order, however, was not executed. Herod died in the thirty-fourth year of his reign, and the sixty-eighth of his age; the first persecutor who raised his hand against the Son of God. His death followed soon after this act of impiety.

How long our Lord remained in the land of Egypt, we are not informed. But some time after the death of Herod, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel,

for they who sought the child's life are dead. On returning, and finding Herod's son Archelaus, whose character resembled that of his father, reigning over Judea in his father's room, he was afraid to settle in that district, and accordingly returned to Nazareth in Galilee, a less suspicious place, under a less jealous prince. The history of several years of our Lord's life is summed up by Luke in the following short but expressive sentence : " And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."

The parents of our Lord, who were distinguished for piety, were in the habit of going up to Jerusalem every year for the purpose of celebrating the passover, as enjoined in the law ; and as it was customary with the Jews to carry up their children with them to that feast, as soon as they came to years capable of bearing the fatigues of the journey, and competent to make moral observations on that great religious festival, Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to the passover, which took place immediately after the completion of his twelfth year ; that is, when he was twelve and a half years of age. After the festival had terminated, the parents of our Lord, with a great multitude of the inhabitants of their town, departed from Jerusa-

lem to return home. But Jesus, whose eager curiosity, and ardent zeal to obtain religious information, were not yet satisfied, stayed behind them in the city; a circumstance which was perhaps ordered by Providence, not merely for his instruction, but to draw the attention of the priests and learned doctors, now released from the religious solemnities of the passover, and the throng of the multitude, towards this extraordinary youth, who was already the most distinguished personage in Israel. The parents of Jesus travelled on for the first day without anxiety, supposing their son to be among the general company; but when they halted for the night, they sought him among their relations and acquaintances, and he was nowhere to be found. The sacred writers make no pathetic display of the distress felt by Joseph and Mary on the occasion; but we may easily conceive the agitations which alternate hopes and fears occasioned in the bosoms of such parents, on missing such a child. Their duty was obvious; they returned directly back to Jerusalem, and, after three days' anxious searching through the city, they found Jesus in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to their doctrines, and asking them questions; whilst all

who heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers.

When Joseph and Mary saw their son in the temple, surrounded by the learned doctors of Israel, and astonishing all who heard him by his matchless wisdom and conversation, they were amazed. His mother, gently remonstrating with him, said: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" The above is our common translation; some, however, translate the passage thus: "Why did ye seek me? Did ye not know that I must be at my Father's?" intimating that the proper place to seek the Son of God was at his Father's house, the temple. His parents understood not the meaning of these sayings. Jesus, however, arose, and went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them, increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

From this time till the commencement of our Lord's public ministry, a period of eighteen years, the sacred writers have thrown a veil over the whole of his history, having not furnished so much as a single anecdote respecting him; except that we may infer, from some of

the taunts of his enemies, that his father was a carpenter, and that he himself wrought at the same trade, no doubt contributing his share to support the family by honest and honourable industry. Had any other writers treated this theme, we would have had this long blank filled up with very interesting, and in some respects, no doubt, very instructive details. The purity of our Lord's life, and the dignity of his manners, would have been celebrated; the tender affection and profound respect with which he uniformly treated his parents, would have been held up as the standard of filial piety; the tenderness of his sensibilities, the warmth of his friendships, his sympathy with the distressed, his promptitude to oblige, his hatred of vice, his love of virtue, his delight in human happiness, would all have been emblazoned in the most glowing colours of the most impassioned eloquence. It certainly could not be from any difficulty of collecting the materials for such an exhibition of the private character of Jesus, that the evangelists have passed over the greater portion of his life in profound silence. We must, therefore, search for the reason of this unusual silence in the nature of their general end and design.

Let it be observed, that it was not the design

of any of the evangelists to write the history of the life and transactions of Jesus of Nazareth; biography, in the usual acceptation, was not their object; nor was their view limited to the exhibiting of the author of their religion, as a perfect example of personal piety and virtue, for the imitation of mankind.

The single object which the evangelists had in view, was to furnish a historical demonstration of the fact, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. If we keep their design distinctly in view, we will perceive a propriety and excellence in their writings, which would otherwise appear a mass of singular confusion. Their notorious disregard of all chronological arrangement, shows that they did not intend to write history. If they had purposed to furnish mankind with a gallery of moral pictures, like the proverbs of Solomon, they would, like Solomon, have given distinctness of outline, and individuality of finish, to their paintings respectively. This unquestionably they have not done; for although, in some parts of the conduct of our Lord, and in some of his sermons, moral pictures are presented, which may be pronounced perfect and complete in all their parts and appendages; the general characteristic of the evangelists, as writers, is, that

they bring together facts and maxims in the most desultory manner, and state few things except by parts and piecemeal. These remarks are not intended to convey, nor in fact do they insinuate, the slightest censure on the writers of these inspired productions: the particular design of a writer, alone, furnishes the key to all correct and enlightened criticism on his work. If, then, we consider that the intention of the evangelists was to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the living God; and if, upon examination, we find that there is not a characteristic of the Messiah, mentioned in the Old Testament, which one or another of these writers has not proved to exist in the person and actions, or sufferings, of Jesus of Nazareth; we will be constrained to acknowledge, that never was a great subject supported by more ample demonstration, and that the evangelists have acquitted themselves in the highest style of excellence, by achieving all that they undertook to perform. We shall show the correctness of these observations in respect to the history of the private life of Jesus, which has been the subject of the present chapter.

Every reader of the New Testament must have remarked the particularity and minuteness with which the evangelists record the circum-

stances attending the birth of Jesus Christ. Their precision in this respect cannot fail to appear extraordinary, when it is contrasted with their total silence respecting his circumstances, conduct and character, from the twelfth till the thirtieth year of his life ; a period which is generally the most important to the biographer, and which is the season when all the powers of body and mind are developed, and the character formed and established. But the wonder will cease when we reflect that all the circumstances recorded respecting the birth of Christ are characteristic of Messiah, and are brought forward expressly to establish our faith in that fact. Some of the occurrences are indeed of so extraordinary a nature, that they merited a place in history on their own account ; but other details into which these writers enter are minute, and apparently trivial, and, in the introduction of any other biography, would be tedious and offensive. We allude particularly to the genealogies furnished by Matthew and Luke. Yet these genealogies are not unnecessarily or impertinently introduced ; they furnish a link in the chain of demonstration, and, in conjunction with matters of apparently greater importance, contribute to establish the grand fact of Jesus's Messiahship. Let us attend to

particular facts in elucidation of our general statement.

The last prophecy in the Old Testament is this: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."* We have the testimony of our Lord, that John the Baptist is the person who was foretold under the name of Elijah;† but, as we are at present discussing the evidences of his own Messiahship, it would be logically improper to urge his declaration as proof in a question, upon the decision of which those evidences in part depend. We shall therefore take a view of the subject not liable to this objection. It is well known that the Jews were to a certain extent tainted with the eastern philosophy, and that many of them held the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, according to the theory taught to the Greeks by Pythagoras, and the same which prevails among the Bramh'uns of India at the present day; and therefore some of the Jews said that Jesus was Elias, some Jeremias, and others, one of the prophets. The prophecy of

* Mal. iv. 5, 6.

† Matt. xi. 16.

Micah, however, pointed not to the literal Elijah, but to a person who should remarkably resemble him in official character; and the resemblance between Elijah and John the Baptist has been owned by all. They were both men of independent spirit, energetic intellect, and mortified habits; daring and intrepid, quick to discover, and severe to denounce every vicious indulgence. They were the two thunderbolts of the spiritual war, and, though good men, they were rather great than amiable.

As John the Baptist was a marked object on the field of prophecy, there is something extraordinary in every circumstance of his history. His parents, like Abraham and Sarah, were childless and superannuated; an angel foretells his birth, a miracle is wrought to chastise his father's incredulity, and in due season John is born. On the birth of his son, Zacharias, inspired by God, thus prophesies of his future character: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

But it is in the circumstances of Jesus's own birth that we must look for the most decisive proofs of his Messiahship. Isaiah had prophesied thus concerning him: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bring forth a son, and

shall call his name Emmanuel."* The angel Gabriel explains this prophecy to Mary in these words: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."† To the same purport, the angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream, thus expresses himself: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost; and she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. (Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying; Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.)" The angels descended from heaven to sing the praises of the new-born Redeemer, and to direct the shepherds in the field to go and hail their king in the city of David. They afterwards conducted the eastern Magi from a far distant country, and brought them into the presence of the Prince of Peace. Thus both Jews and Gentiles were brought together by the agency of the angels of heaven, to pay their obeisance to him who was born to

* Isai. vii. 14.

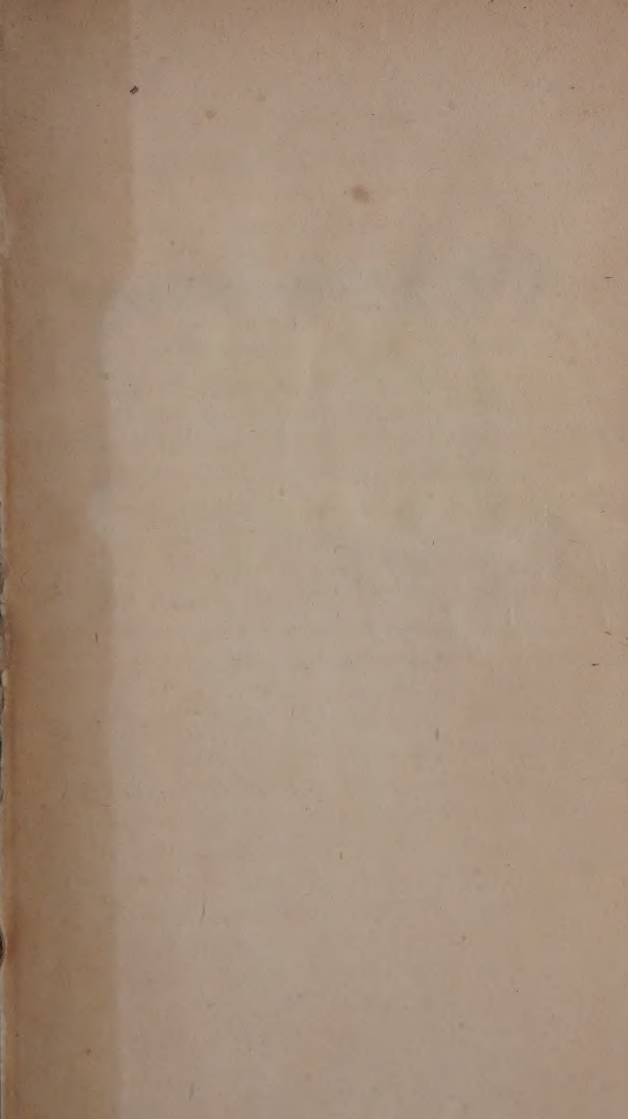
† Luke i. 35.

be a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. And Simeon and Anna, as if the representatives of their respective sexes, spoke of him to all who were seeking salvation in Israel. The circumstances connected with the birth of Jesus, furnished decisive evidence that he was the long-promised Messiah, and are stated minutely and precisely, for the establishment of that important fact.

But the private life of Christ, from the age of twelve till that of thirty years, is not recorded by any sacred writer. Private virtues, however splendid and honourable to the individual, or however beneficial they might become to mankind by being recorded, did not furnish decisive evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God ; and therefore these were all omitted. The evangelists were guided in the selection of the materials of their compositions by the infallible Spirit of inspiration ; and therefore we are not surprised to find in their simple and artless narratives, a profoundness of design not common with other writers. The Messiahship of Jesus must be determined by the circumstances of his birth, and of his public ministry ; and the evangelists have acted on the true principles of logic in not permitting anything, however important it might be in a detached view, to mingle with their arguments, except what con-

tributed to their demonstration. And we think we are entitled to conclude from all the circumstances of the case, that it was neither the sole, nor yet the main design of these writers, to exhibit Jesus as a mere pattern of personal virtue. Had this been their object, their conduct must appear extraordinary and unaccountable.

Of the infantile virtues of Jesus, they have not written so much as would fill a page ; his public life, in which an extraordinary character, extraordinary relations, actions and sufferings, everywhere appear, they have detailed at large ; but the greater part of his life, and that which lay most level with the condition of mankind, and which must have furnished an abundant display of the common graces and virtues which decorate human nature, they have passed over in silence. The only method by which we can account for their conduct, is by supposing that their main object was to demonstrate the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God ; that in the narrative of his public ministry, they found sufficient occasion to exhibit him as a perfect example of human virtue ; but that they saw in his character, and sought to exhibit to others, something of greater dignity and importance than even the spotless purity of his virtuous example.



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